

# **Things of Great Delight**

## **Rewi Alley's Snuff Bottles, their Material History and Use in Cultural Diplomacy**

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## Abstract:

This thesis is a study of the medium of Chinese snuff bottles as objects of social significance; valued both for their connection to materials of prestige in Chinese history and for their efficacy as objects of exchange, especially within political relationships.

It is the first study of the snuff bottles in Canterbury Museum's Rewi Alley Collection and demonstrates the continuation of the social life of snuff bottles as objects of exchange, assembled and donated for the purposes of cultural diplomacy.

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## Notes to the Reader:

1. The title of this thesis, “Things of Great Delight”, comes from one of the first descriptions of snuff bottles by Wang Shih-chen in *Hsiang tsu pi chi* (1705). I refer to it several times in the text.
2. All figures in this thesis are examples taken from Canterbury Museum’s Rewi Alley Collection. They are referred to throughout the text in bold and are listed in order of mention at the end of the work, pages 93-109. In addition I have included images of those bottles in the collection which I have not discussed in the text (all of them ceramic) in order to represent this collection of snuff bottles as a whole. I have not numbered these images as figures, but have included their Canterbury Museum Catalogue number for reference.
3. All foreign words in this thesis have been italicised.
4. Chinese names are presented with last names preceding given names.
5. In accordance with modern scholarship, this thesis makes use of the *pinyin* rather than Wade-Giles method of Chinese Romanization, the exception being for quoted materials and the titles of works. The names of authors are given as they are published. Where both translations have been relevant, alternative spelling is provided in square brackets.
6. In this thesis I will also be referring to the ‘Peking court’ when discussing the imperial assembly of the Qing dynasty, but I will be calling the city by its modern name, Beijing, not Peking.

## Introduction:

Snuff bottles are small items which were first used in China during the Qing dynasty to carry powdered tobacco on one's person. Initially they were used only by the elite, and therefore had to reflect the status of this class. To do this, snuff bottles were deliberately made from materials of significance in Chinese culture so that the value of the material would inform the value of the item. Due to the range of materials used for the one object, snuff bottles are prized as miniscule representations of different crafts within China. Though the habit of snuffing declined, these bottles continue to be sought after by collectors and museums for their ability to offer a particularly broad selection of Chinese arts on a small scale. As objects of value, snuff bottles were used for the purposes of exchange, both when they were first used as practical vessels and later when they were primarily collectors' items. In this way, they reflected both the past and the present; not only were they informed by the histories of those materials which predated them, but they were actively employed to facilitate relationships between those who owned them. This practical role of exchange is an element of the social life of snuff bottles which has remained intact since the Qing dynasty.

The Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum includes eighty snuff bottles to which I will be referring for the purposes of this thesis. They are made of a variety of materials such as jade, ceramic, ivory, lacquer and glass. I have selected examples from this collection which best demonstrate the history and values attributed to these materials in Chinese culture and how they subsequently inform the snuff bottle medium. I will also be using the case of the Rewi Alley Collection to demonstrate the evolution of the social role of snuff bottles over time; more specifically how the collection proves that snuff bottles have maintained their agency for fostering relationships. This is conveyed through the example of individuals like donor Rewi Alley (1897-1987) and Canterbury Museum curator Roger Duff (1912-1978), as well as on an international scale with acts of cultural diplomacy between New Zealand and The People's Republic of China from the 1940s to 1960s (the history of the gifting of the collection is discussed in chapters five and six). By contextualising the Rewi Alley Collection within the material and social history of snuff bottles, I mean to further the study of this particular collection and contribute to the broader field of snuff bottle research.

While studies on the materials used for Chinese arts were more readily available, this thesis has relied heavily on limited sources in regards to the study of snuff bottles. Of particular note were texts written or co-authored by Hugh Moss (*The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection, Snuff Bottles of China*, 'The World in a Bottle in the World at the End of the Qing Empire', and 'Response and Responsibility: Reassessing the Past'), whose specialisation on the subject has proved him to be the one of the most thorough and proficient contributors to the field of snuff bottle research in recent times. *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection* was an invaluable source for understanding the relevance of different materials to the snuff bottle medium (despite the emphasis on artistic connoisseurship in the text). Articles from the *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society* explored a number of individual foreign collections, showing how many of these prioritised materials and individual preference as a means of classification. Of more significance to my research, these articles provided details about selective stages of snuff bottle production which proved useful for piecing together the overall history of the item. So too was the *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty* a valuable source for tracing the presence of snuff bottles in China through the evidence of written accounts. Laufer's work, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, was also

very helpful in aiding my discussion of the early history of snuff bottles. My research, while relying on these sources, has attempted to offer a more cohesive history of snuff bottles specifically as objects of value with social significance; a topic never exclusively pursued in the works mentioned above. As far as I'm aware this thesis is unique to the field of snuff bottle research in that it introduces the Rewi Alley Collection, a case of the use of snuff bottles in twentieth century cultural diplomacy between two Westerners (Alley and Canterbury Museum), and focuses on the greater social aspects of snuff bottles.

Modern studies of snuff bottle collections look to artistic merit to assess overall quality rather than materials.<sup>1</sup> This is an attempt to advance beyond Victorian models of ethnographic collection which treat items more like artefacts than works of art.<sup>2</sup> However in this thesis, not only will I be categorising snuff bottles by material, but I will be looking to their material history to convey their value more than their artistic qualities. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly it is because I intend to provide a social interpretation of snuff bottle history together with a history of materials. By prioritising materials over artistry in this case, the narrative of both histories follows how snuff bottles are socially construed as artistic objects of value, *rather than* objects of artistic value. Specifically, the overriding concern of this thesis is to address the social value of snuff bottles, which is primarily grounded by materials.

Another way of exploring the snuff bottles in this collection would have been to uncover the subject matter and themes depicted in their decoration and how they reflect the aesthetics and values of Chinese culture. To have taken this approach would have compromised the subject of the snuff bottle (as an item) for the sake of the metaphysical interpretation of Chinese art (which the item exhibits). This would have hindered the purpose of my thesis and so I will be categorising the collection by material for the sake of coherency between my two arguments. I will, however, be making an exception for inside-painted snuff bottles which I review as an art which was brought to fruition mostly within the snuff bottle medium; though I will be presenting the artistry of the technique with constant reference to the material at hand.

The second reason I have decided to address this collection by way of materials is that it demonstrates the point I make in Part Two of this thesis that snuff bottles were viewed by collectors as microcosms of the Chinese arts; with the objective to get as wide a variety of materials as possible to complete a 'set' conveying the broadest, most extensive history.<sup>3</sup> My thesis is a literal demonstration of this common approach undertaken by collectors to use snuff bottles as an introduction to these subjects.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the intention for the Rewi Alley Collection was to garner an interest in Chinese culture by way of art; and considering the focus of this thesis addresses the social

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<sup>1</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> In the 1960s the work *Chinese Snuff Bottles: The Adventures and Studies of a Collector* by Lilla S. Perry revolutionised the approach to collecting bottles by prioritising their value as works of art in their own right rather than artworks valued for their materials. However even some of the most famous snuff bottle collectors to follow Perry, such as Bob Stevens who published *The Collectors' Book of Snuff Bottles* in 1976, continued to focus on materials. H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 8.

history of snuff bottles as artistic objects, my study demonstrates how this objective has been partially achieved.

This thesis will be structured into two main sections, each subdivided into additional chapters. Part One gives an overview of the materials used for snuff bottles and their paraphernalia in the Rewi Alley Collection. Many of the bottles in this collection have lost their original stoppers and spatulas, and there is reason to question whether intact pairings are the original combination of bottle and stopper (discussed further in chapter three on ivory). I will be reviewing materials used not only for bottles, but also for stoppers and attached spatulas, regardless of the legitimacy of their pairing. Part One consists of seven chapters, covering jade, ceramics, ivory, lacquer, glass, inside-painting and 'other materials'. As mentioned above, the art of inside-painting is a medium of particular significance to snuff bottles and so will be addressed in its own right, but with ties to the preceding chapter on glass. The final chapter of Part One combines those materials which are present or referenced in the collection but do not hold the same historical or cultural significance as those in previous chapters. These materials include coral, wood, chalcedony, amber and tourmaline.

Part Two follows the evolution of the social life of snuff bottles by outlining their history both within China and amidst the international community. This is to show how the utilisation of snuff bottles as social objects also informed their value, and demonstrates the relevance of the Rewi Alley Collection in this argument. The first chapter discusses how the practice of snuffing was initially valued as an elite practice. The second chapter looks to how snuff bottles were used within this class as gifts and a means of political currency. The third chapter explores the popularisation of snuff amidst the wider Chinese community and the material and social effect this had on snuff bottles. The fourth chapter maps the transition of snuff bottles from a functional object to a collectors' item and the unchanged role of snuff bottles as objects of exchange. The fifth chapter introduces the individual Rewi Alley, the donor of the collection referenced in this thesis. The sixth chapter uses the case of the Rewi Alley Collection to exemplify the role of snuff bottles in modern instances of exchange; reflecting and facilitating relationships of both an individual and international nature. The final chapter in Part Two emphasises how the Rewi Alley Collection provides evidence that snuff bottles continue to be valued as items of exchange just as they were in the Qing dynasty.



## **Part One**

## Chapter One: Jade

Despite the abundance of locations across the globe where jade has been quarried and carved, works produced in Asia first established the material's international reputation. It wasn't until the start of the twentieth century that geological research allowed academics to argue with confidence that "ancient jade objects of Europe and America were not [necessarily] imported from Asia".<sup>5</sup> Prior to this, there was an assumption that jade items could not have been the result of local craft and must have originated from Asian sources. This demonstrates the global impact of this particular relationship between people and product. Jade is not a rare material; quarry sites all over the world have been accessible to many civilizations throughout history.<sup>6</sup> However, jade was valued by the Chinese in a way that did not motivate other groups of people who had similar opportunities to use the material.

The philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC) offered a description of jade which sheds some insight into the way the Chinese believed it to be valuable. He outlined the magnificence of the physical and visual properties of the material and links these to specific human virtues:

Its polish and brilliancy represent the white of purity, its perfect compactness and extreme hardness represent the sureness of intelligence; its angles, which do not cut, although they seem sharp, represent justice; the pure and prolonged sound which it gives forth when one strikes it represents music. Its colour represents loyalty; its interior flaws, always showing themselves through the transparency, call to mind sincerity; its iridescent brightness represents heaven...<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Jade: Its History and Symbolism in China*, New York, Dover Publications, 1912, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 32.

His interpretation of the beauties of jade conveys his approach to these ideals of ethics and justice; highlighting and symbolising exemplary behaviours so that both the material and his philosophies might benefit from one another through comparison.

Antique jade pill jars passed down from the Han dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD) are proposed by Yeung Tat che to be the original containers used in China to hold snuff.<sup>8</sup> These pill bottles, much like later snuff bottles, were conveniently small, sturdy receptacles. This made them ideal for transporting snuff on one's person. It is possible that they could have provided preliminary storage and served as inspiration for the invention of the snuff bottle in China.<sup>9</sup> If so, the similarities between the pill and snuff bottles would have altered the perception of snuffing in favour of its therapeutic applications—an outcome which was ideal in securing justification of use. The potentially dubious aspect of this history is that the pill bottles in question were antiques passed down from the Han dynasty.<sup>10</sup> Given the status of the first snuff clientele, it would be possible for members of the Peking court to have precious and antique items of this nature in their possession, and could have used them as snuff bottles. Yet it *should* be considered that we are presented with a convenient connection to grandeur (through age and legacy of a particular dynasty) which elevates the reputation of the snuff bottle as an item.

The Han dynasty was an era of accomplishment in the working of jade. Production output in jade was high; stylistic developments were so renowned that they were repeated for centuries to come, and technical advances remained practically unchanged until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The end of the Han dynasty also marked the end of ritualistic jades; a role which jade had assumed

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<sup>8</sup> University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> According to Moss, "the exact origins of the snuff bottle are still obscure... claims for its development in remote antiquity have long since been dismissed, along with many other myths—the legacy of earlier enthusiastic but misinformed students" Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 44 and p. 114.

in China since Neolithic times (c. 5000-c.1700 BC).<sup>12</sup> Production of decorative and utilitarian jade objects surpassed the ceremonial pieces like *bi* and *cong*.<sup>13</sup> According to Daoist beliefs, jade was imbued with magical properties of longevity.<sup>14</sup> Because of this it was used for extravagant burials in this period; suits of jade panels (sewn together with gold, silver or copper thread) were made to help preserve the body while jade plugs for orifices like the nostrils would presumably keep the soul from escaping after death.<sup>15</sup> During life, small amounts of crushed jade powder could be added to longevity pills; the 'medicinal' advantages of the substance directly administered through ingestion, not only in the make of the pill vessel.<sup>16</sup> Although the Chinese no longer believed in these particular magical qualities of the material by the time of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) when snuff might have been stored in these kinds of antique containers, the values attached to the material contributed to a pseudo-medicinal idea of the bottle's contents, be they pills or snuff.

The Rewi Alley Collection contains only one jade snuff bottle. However, at least two additional bottles are worthy of mention in this chapter because their material qualities suggest and make reference to the true material. One of these, item C1957.8 (**fig. 1**) is a translucent, white glass bottle meant to emulate "mutton fat" jade. "Mutton fat" is a trade name for nephrite which is pale yellow to white in colour.<sup>17</sup> Here, an important aspect of Chinese jade can be addressed. Unlike the general misconception, jade is not always green. The term 'jade' does not refer to a singular stone but to two minerals of different chemical and structural composition; jadeite and nephrite. Neither is

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> *Bi*: a hollowed ring or disk with thicker walls than *yuan* and *huan* forms. The first jade variant of this shape is seen in Songze culture (3800-2900 BC) [Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p.71] *Cong*: "cylindrical form enclosed by a square-sided box". Only made of jade (except in Shixia culture), most significant ritualistic shape for 2000 years after its initial appearance in Liangzhu culture (3400-2250 BC) [Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, pp. 71-2].

<sup>14</sup> University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p 49.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 26.

exclusively green, but exhibits a variety of hues.<sup>18</sup> Jadeite is, however, better known for its intense shades of vibrant green while nephrite in all its colours only displays a darker or greyish green, even bordering on black. Jadeite is not native to China and was only significantly imported at the end of the eighteenth century from Burma (now Myanmar).<sup>19</sup> At the earliest, jadeite could have only been brought into China around the thirteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The majority of the history of jade in China is, therefore, about nephrite, the type of jade that snuff bottle C1957.8 attempts to imitate.

Colouration holds great significance to the ritualistic and symbolic purposes of jade throughout Chinese history. The text *Zhou li* (written in the early Han dynasty) outlines the shapes and colours of ritual jades used for performances conducted by the Master of Religious Ceremonies:

With the round tablet *bi* of bluish colour, he does homage to Heaven. With the yellow jade tube *cong*, he does homage to the Earth. With the green tablet *gui*, he renders homage to the region of the East. With the red tablet *zhang*, he renders homage to the South. With the white tablet in the shape of a tiger (*hu*), he renders homage to the region of the West. With the black jade piece of semi-circular shape (*huang*) he renders homage to the region of the North.<sup>21</sup>

This text also describes how imperial burial jades were similarly arranged in accordance to the same six cosmic powers: heaven, earth and the four quarters (directions on a compass).<sup>22</sup> Religious philosophies of the Zhou dynasty (eleventh century-256 BC) closely follow these kinds of

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<sup>18</sup> Depending on the iron content, nephrite is capable of adopting very dark and very light colours including the pure white of "mutton jade". S. Howard Hansford, *Chinese Jade Carving*, London, Lund Humphries & Co. Ltd, 1950, p. 21 and Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 22-3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 24 Also of note: Rawson questions the source *Zhou Li*, proposing that it has confused the history of ceremonial jade pieces like *bi*. According to her, the text inaccurately sets them within a linear progression from the Neolithic period onward and fails to recognise their range of differences in terms of size, shape, colour and meaning. Her discussion on the matter can be found in: Jessica Rawson, *Chinese Jade: From the Neolithic to the Qing*, London, The British Museum Press, 1995, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Jade: Its History and Symbolism in China*, New York, Dover Publications, 1912, p. 120.

mathematical, astronomical constructs and their metaphysical interpretation of the universe.<sup>23</sup> As such, while anthropomorphic forms did feature in imagery of these cosmic deities (such as the jade tiger representing the West), of greater import were the less complicated, less earthly symbols: the abstract.<sup>24</sup> These are detailed in the excerpt by identification of shape and colour. During the Zhou dynasty, colouration of jade items was indicative of social hierarchies as well. Of those outlined by Laufer in 1912, white jade held the highest position and was reserved for ornamentation of the emperor.<sup>25</sup>

In its mimicry of “mutton fat” nephrite, the snuff bottle C1957.8 makes many noteworthy references to the history of jade in China. It brings up the differentiation of nephrite and jadeite through which the longer-lasting presence of the former is made apparent (predating the use of jadeite in China by thousands of years). It alludes to ancient concepts of social stratification and celestial, philosophical organization. The fact that the bottle in question is made of glass rather than jade severely diminishes its potential monetary value, but clearly demonstrates how snuff bottles were continually aspiring to exhibit elements of prestige. Jade was a material worthy of replicating; physically prized not only for its colours and translucency, but for its strength and smooth touch. To the eye, this glass mockery of jade would propose the quality and historical significance of jade which was desired to impress observers, without asking the same price of a buyer.

The actual jade snuff bottle in the Rewi Alley Collection, item C1957.1343 (**fig. 2**) provides an extension of this analysis of the role of imitation. While attempts to replicate the features of jade into false models imply the superiority of the material, it is startling to discover that in this instance where the jade is authentic, the carved decoration of the snuff bottle makes reference to another craft. The shallow relief carvings on the shoulders of this snuff bottle take on a similar form of carved handles of grand antique bronze vessels. Unlike the glass snuff bottle C1957.8, this imitation is a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Keverne (ed.), *Jade*, London, Lorenz Books, 1995, p. 24.

deliberate reference to the expertise and achievements of a separate material in a way that doesn't misinform or try to deceive the viewer. It demonstrates the intention of the craftsman to draw on the prestige of additional workshops and their achievements historically without disassociating the item from its true material. The recognisable motifs are used that evoke mental associations to bronze works, thereby enhancing the perceived value of the item to include the reputation of bronze as well as jade.

If jade was considered to be the most valued material in China, bronze was a close second.<sup>26</sup> This was primarily due to the visual appeal of colour and shine that both materials offered. Bronze was first used for weapons in the Shang dynasty (sixteenth-eleventh century BC) and so from this early stage had connections to power and strength, not merely as physical qualities, but as tools for exerting these potentials through human action.<sup>27</sup> With developments of bronze casting came the creative opportunities to remake vessels beyond the shapes of the common ceramic ware it initially copied.<sup>28</sup> The labour-intensive nature of the material made the intense ornamentation and inscription worthy of technical appreciation. As such, bronze vessels were (much like jade objects) symbols of status and wealth. Patrons commissioned grand, ritualistic vessels of a public or sacred nature to impress the living and honour the dead. By the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), the role that these ancient bronzes (and jades) had played in the assertion of political power was a subject of great interest to Chinese scholars and collectors.<sup>29</sup> Their studies revived the value of bronze within China.<sup>30</sup>

The second snuff bottle in this collection to call attention to jade without being made of the material is a porcelain bottle C1957.1240 (**fig. 3**) with the inscription "play jade" on the base. This kind of labelling started during the rule of the Kangxi emperor (1661-1722) when snuff bottles were first

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<sup>26</sup> Jessica Rawson, *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

being made for the Peking court, but was applied to all manner of porcelain ware.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, porcelain was originally intended as a replica of jade; first being referred to as “false jade” in the early Tang dynasty (618-907 AD).<sup>32</sup> While the initial visual differences between jade and porcelain make them difficult to compare (addressed in chapter on ceramics), it is important to recognise the significance which the Chinese placed on the musical qualities afforded by porcelain. According to Savage, “The Chinese refer to porcelain in its widest sense as *tzu*, by which may be understood a substance which gives a resonant note when struck”.<sup>33</sup> This same property is specified in Confucius’ earlier description of jade and provides insight into the values by which both materials could be compared and appreciated.

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<sup>31</sup> Further investigation is required in this matter as the timing (Qing dynasty) disproves any relevance of the initial connection between jade and porcelain.

<sup>32</sup> George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 61.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Two: Ceramics

The products of the Chinese ceramics industry have had more of an impact on the world than any other craft exported from Asia. The accomplishments of a long history of experimentation accumulated into the invention and perfection of porcelain; a mastered product by the time it was first encountered by Europeans in the thirteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Unparalleled in its refinement as a man-made product, the formula and process for its manufacture were labelled by foreigners as ‘secrets’ which they were eager to uncover.<sup>35</sup> The international craze for the material is evident in the etymology of the word “china”, by which most of the world terms porcelain after the craft’s country of origin.<sup>36</sup> This word is still common despite the fact that porcelain production is no longer unique to China, thereby marking the significance of the historical relation of the country with the material product.

The international reputation of china was a consequence of the global trade which mainly took place from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>37</sup> However the prestige of ceramics within China spans as far back as the Shang dynasty (sixteenth-eleventh century BC).<sup>38</sup> Ceramic ware encompasses the category of potted goods made of high-quality clays that are fired at extreme temperatures for prolonged periods of time. The process improves the durability of the items by making surfaces

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<sup>34</sup> Porcelain is first mentioned in European sources by Marco Polo (1254-1324) [D.F Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chinese Export Porcelain: Chine de Commade*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1974, p. 24] at which time the product had already been manufactured in China for centuries [speculation on dates for invention of porcelain can be found in Li Z. and Cheng W., *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. 23].

<sup>35</sup> Letters from Pere d’Entrecolles written during the eighteenth century outline the techniques of making porcelain with a level of detail that could only be meant for the purposes of precise reproduction. This is the earliest source that represents the intention of European artisans to imitate Chinese porcelain. The desire demonstrates the advanced speciality that Chinese ceramic manufacturers had attained compared to other nations. D.F Lunsingh Scheurleer, *Chinese Export Porcelain: Chine de Commade*, London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1974, pp. 25-26 and Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 213-4.

<sup>36</sup> Vimalin Rujivacharakul, ‘China and china: An Introduction to Materiality and a History of Collecting’, in *Collecting China: The World, China, and the History of Collecting*, Vimalin Rujivacharakul (ed.), Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2011, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 212.

<sup>38</sup> At this time the change in material and firing temperature produced what is considered to be the first version of proto-celadon, which in turn is seen as the predecessor of porcelain. Li Z. and Cheng W., *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. ii and p. 23.

which are less porous and more resistant to external influence. The additional labour in production and prolonged life-span of ceramic ware increases its value over potted alternatives. The utilitarian element of this product, while overshadowed by the decorative opportunities taken by craftsmen throughout the centuries, has been the primary cause of its enduring history in China.<sup>39</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, porcelain was initially seen as an imitation of jade. Considering that jade was not exclusively green but a wide variety of colours, porcelain appears to bear a resemblance to white nephrite. However white porcelain wasn't perfected until long after the term 'false jade' was used for the material. Therefore we must assess the resemblance of jade to one of the earliest forms of porcelain; celadon. Celadon generally comes in shades of dull greens and greys, much like additional well-known shades of nephrite.<sup>40</sup> All Chinese ceramics were monochromatic to begin with; the first glazes to be perfected (predating the Tang dynasty) took on shades of green and brown.<sup>41</sup> It is plausible then, that when the first literary reference to 'false jade' was made in the Tang dynasty it was probably describing works of celadon or ceramic of a similar colour.<sup>42</sup> It is perhaps through this association between the two materials that celadon assumed magical properties similar to those attributed to jade. A celadon vessel that contained poison or harmful substances would allegedly crack or discolour to expose the threat.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of the origin of this superstition (either the consequence of its relationship with jade or otherwise), the value of celadon was enough to warrant this magical property.

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<sup>39</sup> "Ceramic production, however, was never devoted to the creation of 'art objects'" Consideration needs to be given to the nature of wares which were preserved. They represent the minority; luxury items as opposed to everyday ceramics. Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 212.

<sup>40</sup> The distinctive shades of Celadon as a ceramic glaze are partially responsible for the coining of the term 'celadon' as a colour. For additional influences see George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Monochrome Ceramics of Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1977, p 13.

<sup>42</sup> George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 61. Regarding other valuable ceramics of a similar colour: "The feudal ruling class monopolized this exquisite ware, known as "porcelain of secret colour" (the olive-green of fine Yue ware), as tribute to the imperial court." Li Z. and Cheng W., *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. ii

<sup>43</sup> George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 69.

The variety of minerals, clays and metals available over the vast geological expanse of China came to provide a multitude of colours that were utilised in the ceramic industry. In the Tang (618-907 AD) and Song Dynasties (960-1279 AD) especially, experimentation with these resources expanded the range of colours beyond the usual greens and browns.<sup>44</sup> It wasn't until relatively late in this time frame that red wares were successfully produced.<sup>45</sup> One myth that arose in regards to the unattainability of the colour tells of the discovery of 'sacrificial red' after a desperate potter threw himself into a kiln.<sup>46</sup> The red glaze termed '*Sang-de-boeuf*' or '*Lang-yao*' was a product of the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 AD) and is exemplified by two snuff bottles of the Rewi Alley Collection, items C1957.19 (**fig. 4**) and C1957.1236 (**fig. 5**).<sup>47</sup> The specialisation of '*Sang-de-boeuf*' would have been a contemporary development of the imperial workshops at Jingdezhen during the reign of the Kangxi emperor, much like the newly adopted snuff bottles were to the Peking court.<sup>48</sup> The monochromatic nature of the glaze links it to the very first ceramics produced in China, but its particular shade (especially when utilised in the make of a snuff bottle) firmly connects it to the Qing dynasty.

In addition to colour, shape was one of the earlier decorative aspects of porcelain. Prior to the Song dynasty, "porcelain was decorated by carving, incising and impressing designs" while during the Song dynasty, "painting on porcelain marked an entirely new stage in Chinese porcelain art".<sup>49</sup> A majority of the porcelain snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley collection have flat or curving planes on which decoration was more easily painted, but several use shape as a primary means of decoration. Two bottles, C1958.70 (**fig. 6**) and C1957.1235 (**fig. 7**), take on the form of squirrels holding plants and boast only minimal colour in their painted eyes. Three more bottles, C1957.20 (**fig. 8**), C1957.1271 (**fig. 9**) and C1957.1285 (**fig. 10**), are humanoid with additional painted details conveying facial

<sup>44</sup> *Monochrome Ceramics of Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1977, p. 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 80.

<sup>47</sup> *Monochrome Ceramics of Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1977, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> "Jingdezhen in Jiangxi Province became the national porcelain centre." "The porcelain town had nearly three hundred government and private kilns." Li Z. and Cheng W., *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1984, p. 81.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ii-iii.

expressions and clothing. Another depicts an entire scene in relief, complete with buildings, landscape and figures, all painted in a variety of colours (item C1957.1265, **fig. 11**). In this order the bottles demonstrate decorating methods of increasing complexity; from conveying singular forms in the round with either minimal or precisely painted details, to intricate settings in miniature with elaborately painted surfaces.

Almost half of the ceramic snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection display the most famous type of Chinese porcelain, blue and white. The Chinese had been experimenting with blue pigments extracted from cobalt since the Tang dynasty, but native resources were rich with manganese, an impurity which diminished the vibrancy of the colour to produce grey-blue results.<sup>50</sup> It wasn't until the fourteenth century that Chinese blue and white ware reached its zenith because of the importation of 'Mohammedan Blue' cobalt from Persia. The use of cobalt oxide for the extraction of a blue colour was not a Chinese invention, but first appeared in the Near East during the ninth century.<sup>51</sup> By the thirteenth century the Persians were also the first to apply a protective outer glaze which preserved this shade.<sup>52</sup> Trade between the Persians and the Chinese was fluent at this time, and as a result 'Mohammedan Blue' was used for all Chinese blue and white porcelain until potters successfully purified local sources of cobalt ore in the seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup>

The prolonged exposure of the Chinese to Persian ceramic ware through the importation of cobalt did not alter the design of blue and white ware to resemble Persian decoration. Instead blue and white designs took after Chinese red and white (a Chinese invention, exemplified in the Rewi Alley Collection by item C1957.458, **fig. 12**).<sup>54</sup> As has already been discussed in the case of 'Sang-de-boeuf', the use of red in ceramic ware was not perfected until the seventeenth century. However experimentation with all colours was underway by time 'Mohammedan Blue' was introduced to

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<sup>50</sup> Sir Harry Garner, *Oriental Blue and White*, London, Faber and Faber, 1970, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

China, and the tractability of the colour (compared to early red and white wares) quickly made blue and white the more popular style.<sup>55</sup> Designs imitated those being painted in red and white with a greater scope for detail; the increased control of the blue colour expanding artistic possibilities. The accomplishments of painting on porcelain afforded by the blue and white wares were so renowned by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that designs were said to have been painted by deities rather than craftsmen.<sup>56</sup>

The examples of blue and white porcelain in the snuff bottles of the Rewi Alley Collections are plentiful and varied in quality. Some of them stand out for the way in which their painted decoration accentuate the shape of the snuff bottle, such as item C1957.1262 (**fig. 13**) which has eight segments of painted decoration to draw attention to what would otherwise be its subtle octagonal form. The decoration of item C1957.23 (**fig. 14**) also makes reference to the overall physical form, as both painted surfaces are contained within circular frames to mirror the bottle's distinctive shape. In this bottle, the painting style is detailed and makes use of fine, thin outlines without additional shading. By contrast, the painted forms on item C1957.1242 (**fig. 15**) have been extensively rendered to convey texture and space. Some of the snuff bottles in this collection combine these two approaches to blue and white painting; alternating between fine lines and heavy rendering. For example the painting in item C1957.457 (**fig. 16**) exhibits brushwork of such extreme variation that the rendered areas appear to be darkened to the intense shades reminiscent of the 'heaped and piled' style. This style was common in blue and white ceramics before the importation of 'Mohammedan Blue', and refers to how the inconsistent purity of the cobalt would change the density of the painted colour so it appeared black in some places rather than blue.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> "it was said of Ts'ang Ying-Hsuan, the director of the Imperial kilns at Ch'ing-te Chen [Jingdezhen] from 1683 to 1726, that 'the figure of God was often seen in the middle of the furnace, either painting designs on the porcelain or shielding it from harm, so that it came out perfect and beautiful'" George Savage, *Porcelain Through the Ages*, Northampton, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 80.

## Chapter Three: Ivory

Ivory is unique among the materials used in snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection in that it is not indigenous to China. Elephants were native (though not in great number) prior to the Zhou dynasty, as evidenced by skeletal remains and very rare artefacts found at Shang dynasty excavation sites.<sup>57</sup> However they were confined to forested areas which were cleared as the Chinese progressed southward, eventually forcing the animals out of the country and into Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and Sumatra.<sup>58</sup> As such, the Chinese came to view elephants and ivory as foreign curiosities. Ivory's value from a cultural standpoint can be assessed in this manner as a trade luxury, and its presence in China often paralleled the fluidity of foreign exchange.

Regardless of their relocation, elephants feature both in Chinese myths and histories as points of interest, conveying the impact they had on the Chinese imagination. In stories about the legendary Shun and Yu emperors (set in the twenty-third and twenty-second century BC), domesticated elephants were used as draft animals to plough land.<sup>59</sup> After his mission to the Western Countries in 128 BC, General Zhang Qian of the Han dynasty described how he'd witnessed elephants in India being ridden into battle.<sup>60</sup> A king of Champa (modern day Vietnam) was described in a Sanskrit inscription of 909 AD to have war-trained elephants at his disposal.<sup>61</sup> They were said to have accompanied him at all public appearances and could eclipse the noise of war drums with their

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<sup>57</sup> "Bones of primeval elephants have been found in Stone Age sites along the Yellow River" R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 157, "Early ivories, found at neolithic sites in the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1030 BC), are very rare. Many of the artefacts found or excavated, which were previously thought to be ivory, have been reclassified as bone, and those of bone outnumber ivory examples" Fiona St Aubyn (ed.), *Ivory: an International History and Illustrated Survey*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 228.

<sup>58</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 157, In regards to the countries where elephants migrated to south of China: William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 157.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Fiona St Aubyn (ed.), *Ivory: an International History and Illustrated Survey*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 231.

roars.<sup>62</sup> During the Tang dynasty the Chinese believed the Cambodians to possess thousands of these battle elephants.<sup>63</sup>

Those elephants which were imported or gifted to the Chinese were only trained for the purposes of entertainment and ceremony, despite the apparent appeal of the animal as an instrument of war.<sup>64</sup> They were readily accepted as tribute to the court, and it is in the context of these elite surroundings and circumstances that elephants were re-introduced into China. Marco Polo made note of New Years' processions involving elephants of the Great Khan.<sup>65</sup> A theatrical battle with elephants at the Tang court was held for the Zhongzong emperor (705-710) in 705.<sup>66</sup> Inside the Imperial City, elephants resided in the stables and grounds, on display as curiosities with little evidence to suggest they were employed in a laborious or martial capacity.<sup>67</sup>

The significance of this to the use of ivory within China is that, it seems, the Tang emperors had a private source of the material via the trained animals they kept in the Forbidden City.<sup>68</sup> Hardly serving more purpose than to make a grand statement of wealth, these elephants were a significant drain on court resources. The Dezong emperor (779-805) of the Tang dynasty is said to have simply released thirty-two of his Cambodian elephants when he thought them too costly.<sup>69</sup> It is plausible then, that some court elephants were occasionally used as a 'local' source of ivory. For the most part, however, raw husks would have been imported from other parts of Asia, and then from Africa after the Song dynasty.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

<sup>65</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 157.

<sup>66</sup> Fiona St Aubyn (ed.), *Ivory: an International History and Illustrated Survey*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 230.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

<sup>70</sup> Trade with Arab merchants in the Song dynasty first introduced ivory from African elephants to China. Subsequent expeditions by Chinese merchants to Africa by the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD) led to extensive importation of the material, which was considered to be superior. Despite the differences in colour, size and texture between Asiatic and African ivory, once carved the source becomes too ambiguous to identify. For this

The elephant's exotic nature, legendary status and selective presence within the Imperial City are part of the reason why ivory, as a by-product of the animal, was considered to be valuable.

Physically, ivory was praised for its calibre as a material for carving. It was softer than jade but offered a similarly attractive polish and fineness of grain. The appeal of the colour, as evident in the English word for the material, was thought to improve with ageing as it acquired "warm tints and a suffused glow", an affect which craftsmen even tried to artificially reproduce on new ivories to increase their appeal and apparent age.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout its entire history in China, ivory has been used to create small treasures both for adornment and ceremony. Even the few earliest examples of ivory in China are "sufficient to show a continued use of the material for noble ornament".<sup>72</sup> The decoration and form of these early ivories resemble those of jade, lacquer and bronzes of the time, indicating that ivory was considered to be comparable to these most highly prized materials.<sup>73</sup> For instance the Neolithic *bi* and *yuan* disks previously discussed in relation to jade were also made of ivory.<sup>74</sup> The ritualistic orientation of these artefacts attests to the value of ivory from a ceremonial standpoint. *Hu*, ceremonial tablets to be looked upon when addressing the emperor, were made of a variety of materials for officials of different status.<sup>75</sup> Lesser dignitaries beheld *hu* made of bamboo or wood, while those of fifth rank could use an ivory *hu*.<sup>76</sup> One record suggests that an heir to the Tang throne carried one such ivory *hu* embossed with gold.<sup>77</sup>

As a small object of luxury made for the upper classes, snuff bottles were perfect items to be made out of ivory. The earliest of these would have likely come from the palace ateliers set up by the

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reason most ivories cannot be dated by origin of the substance. R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 158.

<sup>71</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 158.

<sup>72</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 180.

<sup>74</sup> Fiona St Aubyn (ed.), *Ivory: an International History and Illustrated Survey*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1987, p. 227.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 231.



Kangxi emperor after 1680, one of which was an ivory workshop.<sup>78</sup> However it wasn't until the end of the Qianlong era (1739-1796)—when snuffing was popularised throughout China and a range of new materials were utilised for their production—that ivory was more commonly used to make snuff bottles.<sup>79</sup> This is understandable seeing as larger centres for ivory workshops were in cities where imported ivory could more readily be supplied to carvers. According to C.F. Gordon Cumming, Canton in particular had entire streets filled with studios specialising in the carving of ivory in the late nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup> These craftsmen would not have been commissioned to make snuff bottles until the habit spread to the populace, whereas those in Peking would have been making them earlier on for the socially elite, but in smaller numbers.

Although many snuff bottles were made out of ivory, little of the material can be seen in the Rewi Alley Collection. The only bottle clearly to feature ivory does so only partially; item C1957.1289 (**fig. 17a**) is a wooden snuff bottle which exhibits two ivory panels with incised and painted decoration. The bottle also has an ivory stopper to match the panels, and an ivory spatula (**fig. 17b**). This hints at where a majority of the ivory content can be found; not in the bottles themselves, but in their spatulas hidden inside. In the Rewi Alley Collection, at least three snuff bottle spatulas are made of ivory, and another seven of bone.<sup>81</sup>

Most of the snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection have lost their stoppers and attached spatulas over the decades and it is unlikely that all the complete pairs of bottles and stoppers are the original combination. Considering the similarities between the stopper and bottle in terms of shape and material, item C1957.1289 is probably one of the examples in the collection of an intact pairing. Other instances are less certain, like the lacquered snuff bottle (C1957.1291, **fig. 18a**) which has a poorly fitting stopper that also contrasts with the distinctive material of the bottle without

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<sup>78</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Biblot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 28.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>81</sup> Items C1957.1258, C1957.1289 and C1971.24 have spatulas made of ivory. Items labelled as bone include: C1957.1240, C1957.1241, C1957.1245, C1957.1248, C1957.1252, C1957.1287 and C1957.1269.

complimenting it. A number of bottles in the collection are coupled with a plain, orange stopper and collar of unidentified materials which are very similar to the stopper of item C1957.1291.<sup>82</sup>

The recurrence of this stopper design used for snuff bottles made of a wide range of materials (such as the aforementioned items which include jade, internal painting, stone and ceramic bottles), implies that they were a staple model. It is possible that they were made for generically replacing lost stoppers, though there is no evidence to support this. Considering how many stoppers of this make and appearance can be found in other collections (such as the extensive J&J Collection), it might be a topic worthy of further research.<sup>83</sup> Regardless, after the original stopper of a snuff bottle was lost, a replacement would be selected with consideration to size and how its appearance compliments the overall bottle. By contrast, the spatula was less likely to be considered in the aesthetic judgement.

For those bottles *with* stoppers in this collection, the attached spatulas are alternatively made of wood or metal, but the ten made of ivory or bone make up the majority. According to Moss, Graham and Tsang, this is not uncommon for snuff bottles since ivory is one of the materials expected to be used for spatulas.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, one of the first descriptions of snuff bottles, from 1705, confirms this:

Glass bottles of all and every shape and colour are made to contain it [snuff]. The colours are red, purple, yellow, white, black and green. The white is like crystal and the red like fire.

Things of great delight. There is an ivory spoon which is returned to the flask after sniffing.<sup>85</sup>

This passage generalises that all the materials used for bottles were varieties of coloured glass, while specifying that the spatulas were made of ivory.

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<sup>82</sup> Items C1957.464, C1957.1343, C1957.1328, C1957.1293, C1957.1287 and C1957.463 have stoppers which bear a resemblance to item C1957.1291.

<sup>83</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I and II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993.

<sup>84</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 753.

<sup>85</sup> *Hsiang tsu pi chi* by Wang Shih-chen, 1705, as cited by Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 13.

Although ivory was a highly valued material, in the case of snuff bottle spatulas it was used in an invisible capacity, except that, for those who used the snuff bottle, the spatula played an important part in the delicate task of extracting the snuff from the container to place on the back of one's thumb. It was not entirely kept out of sight, but seen when the item was in use. Although there were some spatulas deliberately made with artistic merit, most were designed simply to fulfil this function, not to be admired with the rest of the bottle.<sup>86</sup> The implication is that although the device itself was rarely *artistic*, it was nevertheless made of a high quality material which would be noticed and appreciated by the user. As a foreign material, ivory was valued for its association with the legendary and exotic. As a material used for ceremonial purposes, it was imbued with cultural values. Regardless of the level of carving it displayed, ivory as a material was valued and appreciated. As a hidden detail privy only to users of the bottle, the material demonstrates the quality of the item as a whole. Just as the excellence of the snuff would contribute to the assessment of the snuff bottle experience, so too would a high-quality material like ivory be appreciated, even when only admired in passing.

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<sup>86</sup> A few unique spatulas are pictured in H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 754.

## Chapter Four: Lacquer

Lacquer, alongside jade, bronze and silk, was one of the most highly prized materials in early Chinese history.<sup>87</sup> It most commonly originates from the sap of the *rhus verniciflua* tree, native to East Asia and monopolised by the Chinese until approximately the seventh century AD.<sup>88</sup> When set, it is one of the most durable of botanically-derived products, offering a hard surface that is waterproof and resistant to insect and heat damage.<sup>89</sup> For these practical advantages it was sought-after to harden more fragile or permeable materials such as wood and silk. Visually, lacquer is prized for its lustre, intense colour (most popularly red or black), and the level of precision it affords for decorating surfaces.

Lacquer of high quality is an ideal material for carving, but only when the coat is thick enough for relief work instead of just shallow incision. This process of coating is time consuming and labour intensive, requiring anywhere up to two hundred thin layers, each taking a number of days or even weeks to set, and only in carefully monitored conditions.<sup>90</sup> If a layer is too thick it will only solidify to form an outer shell while the interior remains in its liquid state, making the piece unsuitable for carving.<sup>91</sup> As early as the third century BC, attempts were made to hasten the process of layering by substituting purer mixtures of lacquer and pigment with quantities of ash (in the hopes of making thicker layers which could retain their shape).<sup>92</sup> However this method compromised the quality of

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<sup>87</sup> Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 178.

<sup>88</sup> The two phases proposed in the history of lacquer wares are divided by the introduction of the material to Japan at this time. Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, p. 16 The earliest examples of lacquer found in China are believed to be the inlays of bronze ritual vessels from the twelfth century BC. Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>89</sup> Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 174 and Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, p. 15.

<sup>90</sup> A study of Ming dynasty lacquer revealed that up to two hundred layers measuring 0.03 mm or less were to be expected of fine pieces from this era. Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, p. 23. In reference to the carefully monitored conditions for setting lacquer: "The temperature and humidity were also critical, the humidity preventing the lacquer from drying out and cracking. Indeed, lacquer has to be kept damp if it is to harden at all." Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 175.

<sup>91</sup> Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, pp. 23-24.

texture and carving potential of the finished piece. Thus the technique of extensive layering has remained practically unchanged since its perfection in the fourteenth century.<sup>93</sup>

Adding to the complications of lacquer manufacture, the sap in its raw form is poisonous to the skin, causing an urushiol allergy (also caused by poison oak and ivy) when inappropriately handled.<sup>94</sup> The process of setting the layers correctly is therefore essential not only for the quality and aesthetic of the wares, but in order to render the substance harmless. A chemical process of polymerization is undergone by maintaining an environment that is devoid of carbon dioxide and nitrogen and rich in oxygen, allowing fresh layers of lacquer to harden without drying out.<sup>95</sup> The accomplishment of this method is praised in 'An early mediaeval Chinese alchemical text on aqueous solutions' where Chinese lacquering is called "the most ancient industrial plastic known to man".<sup>96</sup> The same text also validates through scientific deliberation the long-used Chinese remedy of crab tissues or shell fish to cure the effects of the urushiol allergy. This indicates that mastery and understanding of lacquer was evident even these preliminary stages of its preparation.

The manufacture of lacquer is clearly one of the most labour-intensive processes undergone to make a luxury item in China. This in itself contributes significantly to its value. The Han dynasty text *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (c. 80 BC) claims that lacquer ware cost as much as ten times the amount of bronze because a single cup required a work force of one hundred men to create.<sup>97</sup> Considering that the application of lacquer coats as outlined above was only one (albeit crucial and lengthy) factor to the process, this statement may not be as exaggerated as it sounds. The creation of the base structure (be it metal, ceramic, wood, cloth etc.) and decoration of the outer surface (especially by the Tang dynasty when inlay of mother of pearl and precious metals such as gold and silver

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, pp. 21-22.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> Ts'ao T'ien-ch'in, Ho Ping-yu, and Joseph Needham, 'An early mediaeval Chinese alchemical text on aqueous solutions', *Ambix*, Vol. VII, No. 3, 1959, pp. 122-53, cited by Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Cited by Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 175.

accompanied the usual carved décor) would have involved a multitude of studios and craftsmen. One Han dynasty cup in the British Museum includes an inscription naming thirteen individual contributors to its production, including a number of officials and overseers of the craftsmen.<sup>98</sup> The assessment of quality through the manufacturing process was clearly as integral an aspect to the creation of the piece as the physical manipulation of the object, and a number of works from this period bear similarly detailed inscriptions.<sup>99</sup>

While lacquering techniques were perfected throughout Asia, Chinese mastery of carved cinnabar lacquer was unparalleled. The earliest extant pieces of carved lacquer are found coating the untanned leather panels of Tang dynasty armour.<sup>100</sup> Reference to proofing armour with cinnabar lacquer is made in the *Tso Chuan* (fourth century BC), indicating that this technique was used far in advance of those examples which have survived today.<sup>101</sup> Clearly in this instance lacquer was applied for the purpose of functionality, strengthening the material so it was suitable for bodily protection. However by the time of the Qing dynasty, carved cinnabar lacquer was used predominantly for the decoration of luxury items. The physical properties of lacquer as a material were superseded in some respects by the quality of decoration on their outer surface; specifically to what extent the carved images resembled Chinese paintings.<sup>102</sup>

Snuff bottle C1957.1291 is one such example of carved cinnabar lacquer. It stands out both in stature and material; being one of the larger of the snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection and the only one made of lacquer. The material is not very smoothly applied and undecorated spaces reveal the uneven surface area which distorts the entire shape of the bottle (**figures 18a and 18c**). Most of the exterior is carved with crowded patterns to create a landscape scene in a garden. Very deep relief carving hints at the amount of labour put into the work in terms of extensive layering. This

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, pp. 30-31.

<sup>100</sup> Sir Harry Garner, *Chinese Lacquer*, London, Faber and Faber Ltd., 1979, pp. 65-68.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "The landscape scenes, the human figures, the buildings and the animals must be as fine as any found in paintings for the vessel to be considered a true masterpiece" *Masterpieces of Chinese Carved Lacquer Ware in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan*, The National Palace Museum, 1971, pp. 75-76.

depth allows for both a depiction of space through raised foreground and recessed background images and for more variation in carving; as exhibited by the range of sculpted forms and designs. Nevertheless, repetition is plentiful in this work, seen even in the imitation of figures on opposite sides of the bottle that hold identical poses and whose robes bear almost the same folds (**figures 18b and 18c**). Expanses of ground and sky in this snuff bottle exhibit repetitive, geometric designs known as diapers. These patterns had been used for lacquer carving to depict areas of sky, sea and earth since the fourteenth century, with several referencing other art forms of earlier eras.<sup>103</sup> The land brocades, for instance, were taken from textile patterns used the late Song and Yuan Dynasties.<sup>104</sup>

Lacquer had a particular allure during the Qing dynasty as a historical item within China. An account in Hsien K'un's *Chin Yu Suo Suei* tells of an antique dealer of the early Qing dynasty who discovered gold within a lacquered vessel from the Song dynasty when he mistakenly broke it.<sup>105</sup> Regardless of the praise accorded to Song lacquer wares, many antiques from this period were subsequently destroyed in the pursuit of more valuable interiors.<sup>106</sup> It is possible, then, that lacquered items (even those being *produced* during the Qing dynasty) would have held an additional element of mystery, hinting at the possibility of treasures hidden beneath the surface. For the snuff bottle medium in particular, which served as a container for a substance which was as equally assessable as its vessel, the content of the item was already a matter of interest. As mentioned in the chapter on ivory, the spatula hidden inside the bottle was also an object of appraisal. It would be fair to assume then, that for a material known at the time for concealing gold (albeit in antique vessels), lacquer would have been an ideal material for implying the value of the snuff bottle's contents.

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<sup>103</sup> James C.Y. Watt and Barbara Brennan Ford, *East Asian Lacquer: The Florence and Herbert Irving Collection*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991, p. 105.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in *Masterpieces of Chinese Carved Lacquer Ware in the National Palace Museum, Taiwan*, The National Palace Museum, 1971, pp. 76-77.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Five: Glass

Glass was made as early as the third century BC in China; however the material never gained as much traction as it did in other parts of the world like Rome, Egypt and the Middle East.<sup>107</sup> It did not feature heavily in Chinese history until 1696 when an imperial workshop was first dedicated to the craft of glass making and state patronage encouraged production.<sup>108</sup> Its popularity relied heavily on foreign influence. Interest was first peaked by wares brought to the court from Europe in the Qing dynasty. The earliest recorded gift during this time was made to the Kangxi emperor in 1669.<sup>109</sup> He subsequently recruited foreign talents such as those of Jesuit missionary and trained glass maker, Kilian Stumpf, to supervise the inclusion of the craft to the palace ateliers.<sup>110</sup> By 1731 imperial interest in glass was such that the Yongzheng emperor relocated the workshops to the Yuanming Yuan Summer Palace, where he more often resided, in order to personally oversee their work.<sup>111</sup> Both the Yuanming Yuan Summer Palace and its furnishings took after Western design, featuring glass items and décor from this workshop.<sup>112</sup>

Jane Portal suggests that “the excellence of all other materials such as jade, porcelain and lacquer, all of which could produce glossy, translucent surfaces” could explain why the Chinese did not have much of an interest in glass.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, one of the most common uses of glass in China was as an inexpensive replica of jade products, as already discussed in regards to item C1957.8 (**fig. 1**) of the Rewi Alley Collection. The Seligman Collection contains a number of such glass items dating from the Han dynasty made in the guise of jade burial pieces, demonstrating that Chinese glass had served

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<sup>107</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 170.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Jane Portal, ‘Decorative Arts for Display’, in Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 191.



this imitative purpose for centuries.<sup>114</sup> The extensive variations in transparency, pattern and colour open to glass workers meant they could imitate virtually any material, not only jade. For instance item C1975.50 (**fig. 19**) of the Rewi Alley Collection is a glass replica of amber, a material not unpopular with snuff bottles.<sup>115</sup> So too is the stopper of item C1957.1283 (**fig. 20**) a glass imitation of tourmaline.

It is proposed by Moss, Graham and Tsang that a glass snuff bottle can “serve two functions: it is an imitation...and it is the expression of a glass-maker delighting in the unique possibilities of his medium”.<sup>116</sup> That is to say, glass imitations, while referencing superior materials, are simultaneously celebrated as glass and valued for their versatility. Indeed, one of the earliest references to Chinese snuff bottles (1705) claims that they are *all* made of glass of different colours and shapes.<sup>117</sup> This source specifies that “The white [glass] is like crystal and the red like fire. Things of great delight.”<sup>118</sup> In this passage, glass is praised for its ability both to imitate other materials and depict a vibrancy of colour akin to those found in the natural world.

The creative possibilities offered to glass workers, coupled with its imitative function, probably inspired the revival of the cameo or overlay glass technique in China. This is a method by which additional layers of glass are applied and then cut away to reveal the base and form raised patterns in different colours. The practise was invented by the Romans in the first century AD, but given that it was not commonly practised in the West when it was first recorded as a product at the Imperial Glass Factory in 1708, it is likely that overlay glass was reinvented by the Chinese independently.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “The Seligman Collection contained a glass cicada (for placing on the tongue of the dead) imitating a jade form; a glass *pi*, a pig, and several pieces of sword furniture, all in imitation of jade originals.” R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 122.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>116</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 580.

<sup>117</sup> *Hsiang tsu pi chi* by Wang Shih-chen, 1705, quoted by Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Biblot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Regarding cameo glass in the West: William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 170; regarding to the first instance of Chinese overlay glass in 1708: H. Moss, V.

Considering the lapidary accomplishments by the Chinese (especially the techniques of layering and carving lacquer of contrasting colours), as well as their use of glass as an imitative material, their independent discovery of overlay glass would seem inevitable.<sup>120</sup> In 1774 the Jesuit Father Amoit wrote of the inferiority of European vessels for carrying snuff in China, specifying that “the Chinese make many more examples in coloured glass and carved glass and we should follow their taste and copy those examples”.<sup>121</sup>

The Rewi Alley Collections has three snuff bottles which exhibit the overlay glass technique. Item C1957.1270 (**fig. 21**) features a number of bats and clouds in a continuous image. Rounded carved details within the blue overlay compliment the manner in which their forms gently wrap around the sides of the bottle. Item C1957.9 (**fig. 22**) is decorated only on one side with a silhouette of a fisherman in golden overlay against frosted glass. The contrast between the coloured layers presents a dynamic silhouette in profile, the outer line giving dramatic form to the image. The overlay is thin and the only additional incision or evidence of carving to suggest internal detail is the striking eye of the caught fish. This detail makes the image resemble a shadow puppet. Item C1957.5 (**fig. 23a**) has red overlay on white glass in a continuous floral pattern. Varying heights, carved patterns and motifs are repeatedly used to distinguish between leaves, branches and fruit. These sculptural qualities in the bottle are demonstrated further in the lapidary work of the coral stopper (**fig. 23b**) and the formation of the base, made out of three pieces of overlay glass carved in high relief (**fig. 23c**). They glass fruits seamlessly extend from the design to serve as a tripod upon which the bottle can be balanced. This item presents the possibility for functional and decorative purposes of a snuff bottle to intersect, however also foreshadows the prioritisation of sculptural qualities in snuff bottles of the

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Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 502.

<sup>120</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 170.

<sup>121</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 30.

late nineteenth century, which was to compromise—rather than contribute to—their practical attributes (discussed further in Part Two).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> “Toward the end of the snuff-bottle period, to a large extent under the influence of foreign collectors during the second half of the century, bottles began to grow outward in surface relief and take on less regular forms as their sculptural qualities out-weighed their function.” H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 502.

## Chapter Six: Inside Painting

A large portion of glass snuff bottles were used not as sculptural works, but as ‘canvases’ for pictorial decoration. Glass could be used to imitate blue and white porcelain, with underglaze cobalt designs applied to the surface just as it was to ceramics.<sup>123</sup> So too could enamels be painted on a glass base just as they were on metal or ceramic ones. With these two techniques, the glazing or firing process would protect the painted imagery even though it was exposed on the outside of the bottle. The use of more common mineral or vegetable-based pigments was impractical for this reason, and it is possible that an attempt to protect such decoration from the elements led to the technique of inside-painted glass snuff bottles.<sup>124</sup> Painting on the reverse of flat transparent or mirror glass was previously not unheard of in China, and such products had been made for export from Canton in the eighteenth century.<sup>125</sup> Inside-painted snuff bottles were far more popular, but not until the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>126</sup>

The practical challenge of painting the interior of a glass snuff bottle meant the finished product was first and foremost admired as a technical marvel. The extent of the complications presented in painting the back of plate glass, such as those made in Canton, was limited to applying the foreground image before the background.<sup>127</sup> Painting inside a small, pre-made snuff bottle was considerably more difficult. The artist had to use a special pen fashioned out of bamboo, bent and sharpened at the end, which was small enough to manoeuvre through the neck of the bottle, the diameter of which was often just over six millimetres.<sup>128</sup> With it, the artist would coarsen the inner surface “to give the paint a grip and some protection from the action of the spoon” and then paint

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<sup>123</sup> Shawn Eichman, ‘Interior Landscapes: The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle’, *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIII, no. 1, Spring, 2011, p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 122.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139.

<sup>126</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 177

<sup>127</sup> Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 193-194.

<sup>128</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, the Urban Council, 1978, p. 36.

an entire miniature scene in reverse.<sup>129</sup> In keeping with the traditions of Chinese painting, calligraphic text would often accompany the image on the snuff bottle. These too had to be written backwards.

A focus on the skill involved in creating these bottles is evident in the legends that arose regarding the origin of inside-painting and the specifics of the practise. Western speculation on technique was especially fanciful, and it was suggested that painters had to use single hairs for brushes or even long fingernails.<sup>130</sup> A misinterpretation of the term 'back-painting' even led to the belief that artists had to lie on their back and hold the glass bottle to the sun as they painted.<sup>131</sup> A more detailed (presumably Chinese) myth suggests that inside-painting was invented by a monk in the Qing dynasty after he witnessed a provincial official accidentally marking the inside of his glass snuff bottle with a bamboo pick as he tried to scrape the last bits of snuff from the container.<sup>132</sup> Clearly interest in the methodology and invention of inside-painting prioritises the work of the artist over the work of the glass-maker.

Little attention, therefore, is given to the glass itself when inside-painted glass snuff bottles are evaluated. Unlike the possibilities offered by overlay glass to restructure the shape of the snuff bottle, the demands of internal painting for a flattened surface meant that these bottles offered little variation in form. They typically presented a clear front and reverse sides for vignettes, or sometimes a smooth curve for continuous scenes. Item C1957.464 of the Rewi Alley Collection is rounded, but still distinguishes between the two sides through separate images: one of a dense, dynamic landscape (**fig. 24a**) and one a more intimate view of a pond (**fig. 24b**). Unlike other inside-painted images in the collection, item C1957.464 does not take advantage of its medium's potential as a canvas to create the illusion of space. Instead it conforms to the literal limitations of the surface

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 55.

area, offering an extreme tilt in the picture plane with little reprieve through negative space. That is to say, it demonstrates a failure to utilise fully the unpainted glass surface, crowding the space with imagery.

Indifference to the glasswork of inside-painted snuff bottles is reflected by the fact that painters just as easily swapped a blank glass bottle for one made of crystal, chalcedony or amber depending on the availability of the 'canvas' in question.<sup>133</sup> As already seen in the item C1975.50 (**fig. 19**) of the Rewi Alley Collection, an inside painting was applied to this glass bottle which resembles flawless amber, representing how inside-painting was not limited to a single material. In a letter to Roger Duff at the Canterbury Museum in 1957, Rewi Alley expressed concern that the glass snuff bottles of the collection cannot be distinguished from the crystal.<sup>134</sup> This is a particular issue when it comes to dating items, as unpainted crystal snuff bottles predating the late nineteenth century (and the boom of inside-painting) were later used for internal paintings just as readily as purpose-made ones.<sup>135</sup>

Item C1957.467 might be crystal or a very good imitation of it, based on comparisons to confirmed crystal bottles which tend to exhibit a diffused inner glow or translucence which is more natural-looking, and golden, than glass copies. One side of this snuff bottle has a still-life of potted plants, executed with inconsistent linear perspective and clumsy brushstrokes (**fig. 25a**). The other side is a far better depiction of a mountain scene, the artist clearly showing more experience in natural forms (**fig. 25b**). The mistiness of the bottle compliments the colours on this side of the bottle, making them more suitably indistinct within the landscape, blending as if to purposefully convey atmosphere. As noted by Moss, Graham and Tsang: "The finest painting in a crude bottle is unquestionably diminished as an overall work of art, whereas a lesser painting in a superb bottle is

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<sup>133</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, pp. 688-689.

<sup>134</sup> Alley to Duff, 4 April 1957, Canterbury Museum Records [henceforth CMR], 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Director's Correspondence: 1957-1958', 6/11, box 63, folder 119.

<sup>135</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 688.

undeniably enhanced.”<sup>136</sup> This is one such instance where, regardless of the bottle being made of crystal or glass, the physical aspects of its material improve the images depicted within.

Despite the role that glass and crystal can have on the assessment of a snuff bottle as a composite piece, the quality of the painting ultimately determines the value of inside-painted works. Items C1957.466 and C1957.468 of the Rewi Alley Collection for instance, demonstrate a distinctly poor quality of painting for different reasons. Item C1957.466 has an almost comical caricature of a horse on one side (**fig. 26a**) framed with the same washed-out natural features which decorate the landscape on the opposite side (**fig. 26b**). The minimal brushwork is ineffective at conveying masterful textures and forms in the image. Item C1957.468 (**figures 27a and 27b**) exhibits far more painterly skill, but the effects of time have worn away a great deal of the image and made the extent of skill difficult to assess. As seen before in this collection, this bottle also features sculpted handles imitating archaic bronzes. However the faded picture, unattributed to any particular artist, diminishes the value of the work more than the sculpted form enhances it.

Painting and calligraphy are distinguished from other Chinese arts in the naming of individual artists and masters.<sup>137</sup> A craftsman making a glass snuff bottle would remain anonymous, but an artist of an inside-painted bottle would sign their works and garner a reputation. As Watson and Ho describe:

inside-painting glass artists produced the only group of pre-twentieth-century glasswork that became part of the artist-oriented collecting tradition—not only were the names and biographical details of such artists available to contemporary collectors, but their distinctive painting styles have been continued and recognized through their followers<sup>138</sup>

Only a select group of inside-painters had the skill to produce paintings which would be of high quality when removed from the context of the snuff bottle. A forerunner and suggested inventor of

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<sup>136</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 713.

<sup>137</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 178

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 177-178.

the inside-painting tradition was Kan Huan, artist of the earliest dated inside-painted snuff bottle from 1816.<sup>139</sup> Other artists like Zhou Leyuan (active 1881-1893) and Ding Erzhong (1893 to the early 1930s) were also esteemed as “lofty idealist painters revered in the literati tradition”, standing above those who, while competent, were repetitive and more focused on commercial pursuits of inside-painting.<sup>140</sup>

Zhou Leyuan, in particular, was a highly revered master of this medium.<sup>141</sup> There is no record to confirm that he was a member of the literati (as there is for his follower Ding Erzhong for instance) but there is good reason to believe he might have been, considering how heavily he was influenced by the intellectual and artistic traditions of the class.<sup>142</sup> His masterful inside-paintings exhibit the literati idea that in painting, subject matter and representation are inferior to the movement of the brush and its depiction of form, colour, and texture.<sup>143</sup> These elements inspire the “wonder beyond the painting”; in essence communicating more emotively and variably than the subject matter itself.<sup>144</sup> Moss, Graham and Tsang describe how Zhou Leyuan’s brushwork was “a perfect balance between what it is describing and its independent dance”, successfully celebrating the act of painting just as much as the subject in the picture.<sup>145</sup>

Also in the literati tradition, Zhou reinvented every scene he painted through his variation of brushwork and composition; no two snuff bottles he painted were exactly alike.<sup>146</sup> In this way he could paint identical subjects without ever replicating his own work, continuously re-describing a

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<sup>139</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, the Urban Council, 1978, p. 36.

<sup>140</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 710.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 664.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 677.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 665 and p. 670.

<sup>144</sup> Huang Yu wrote in *Ershisi Huapin* (‘Twenty-four Qualities of Painting’): “Idea leads brush. Wonder beyond the painting!” Referenced by H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 669.

<sup>145</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 665.

<sup>146</sup> “Zhou’s artistic nature, however, is confirmed by the fact that although he returned often to the subject he never once, in dozens of examples, repeated the composition.” H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 670.



scene. Many other inside-painting artists were more focused on completing a work and conforming to the successful models they knew would sell (often copying from a pattern book) rather than refreshing their subject in the spirit of Chinese painting traditions.<sup>147</sup> The inside-painted snuff bottles of Ding Erzhong, a confirmed member of the literati, also demonstrated this prioritisation of artistic integrity over commercialisation.<sup>148</sup> It is the similarity between Zhou Leyuan and Ding Erzhong's approach to their art (in contrast to other artists in the field) which suggests that Zhou was likewise influenced and driven by the literati, even if not formally belonging to this group.

There is one inside-painted snuff bottle bearing the signature of Zhou Leyuan in the Rewi Alley Collection (item C1957.463). Although it features a continuous scene it actually offers two interpretations of an almost identical landscape (**figures 28a** and **28b**). Minor variations in subject matter (like placement of people and details of buildings) are eclipsed by the alternate brushwork between the two scenes, which describe what appears to be the same landscape in different ways. This demonstrates the revival of subject through variation in brushwork, although it is unusual to have two sides to compare on the one item. The inscription on one side states "clouds and mists surrounding the mountain stones", while the other details the year of production (either 1834 or 1894) alongside Zhou's signature.

It is highly unlikely that this snuff bottle was painted by Zhou himself. For a start, the years offered on the bottle are outside those when he worked; 1834 far predating his career and (the more probable) 1894 just outdating its end. If the bottle was meant to pass as a forgery of Zhou's work, the painter would have taken better care to label its production date more convincingly within a plausible time-frame. Aside from this, comparison between this bottle in the Rewi Alley Collection and a confirmed inside-painting by Zhou reveals the inferior talent shown in the former painting. In light of this, the duplication of the scenery on the two sides of the bottle, while referencing literati

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 670.

<sup>148</sup> Regarding the dates of Erzhong's career: Ibid, p 680. Regarding the mention of Erzhong in "biographical dictionaries which concentrate on the literati": Ibid, p 677.

traditions, appears to be more of a repetition of a subject as it is being practised; a set of drafts showing the artist experimenting with technique rather a master celebrating the subtleties of his art through equally sophisticated paintings.

This leads us to another common trait in Chinese painting traditions: copying the work of acknowledged masters. Artistic accomplishment in China constantly referred to the perfected framework: artists followed a strict process of discipleship, adhering to the painting masters, first to imitate their pictures, then interpret their style, and finally graduate to become masters with their own creative freedoms rooted in pre-existing practise.<sup>149</sup> Moss, Graham and Tsang write, “In China it was perfectly acceptable to paint in the style of others without any loss of individual creativity being recognised by either artist or audience”.<sup>150</sup> Item C1957.463 of the Rewi Alley Collection demonstrates this process of apprenticeship to the medium and emphasises the status of Zhou Leyuan as a master of inside-painting. Ascribing a work to Zhou was a way of recognising his contribution to the art, a sign of respect that a student would offer before embarking on their individual style.

Zhou was perhaps the most influential artist in his field. He established the Beijing school of painting, which ran until 1949 and led what is known as the middle stage in the history of inside-painting.<sup>151</sup> This stage was the greatest in both scale and quality of works produced in this medium.<sup>152</sup> In his position at the head of the school, Zhou obviously had a direct impact on those first students who followed him. During their training, many of them copied his examples down to the signature, as discussed by Moss: “they signed his [Zhou’s] name until they achieved recognition in their own right”.<sup>153</sup> Instruction continued in the Beijing school with reference to Zhou’s style long after the cessation of his involvement in 1893, and even later schools were similarly devoted to Zhou’s

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<sup>149</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 674-5.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p 675.

<sup>151</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 36.

<sup>152</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, the Urban Council, 1978, pp. 36-37.

<sup>153</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 36.

example. This was the case in the school of painting set up in this middle period in Shangdong, established by graduate of the Beijing School, Bi Rongjiu.<sup>154</sup> The Ye Family of the modern stage of inside-painters, in the 1950s, also looked to Zhou Leyuan for inspiration; Ye Xiaofeng specifically producing works under his father's name Ye Zhongsan, but only in the style of Zhou.<sup>155</sup> It was not unheard of for an inside-painter to choose to work under Zhou's name for the whole of their career.<sup>156</sup>

A far lesser known, but nevertheless copied inside-painter, was Xue Shaofu (active 1918-1938), to whom two bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection are credited. Bottles C1957.1280 and C1957.12 exhibit his signature, though stylistically they bear little resemblance to one another. Item C1957.1280 (**figures 29a and 29b**) shows scenes from the famous subject of a 'Hundred Children' with blank expanses of colour filling in the awkward forms of children at play amidst distinctively rigid lines of grass. Item C1957.12 (**figures 30a and 30b**) depicts the four basic professions in Chinese tradition—the fisherman, woodman, farmer and scholar—in a very different style to the previous bottle.<sup>157</sup> Not only are the forms more clearly defined by fluid outlines, but the landscape features more effective shading techniques completely absent in item C1957.1280. Many copies of this exact style and composition bearing the name Xue Shaofu exist with varying degrees of quality, indicating that the artist was a regular model for inside-painters.<sup>158</sup> It is reasonable to assume that, as with Zhou Leyuan, the bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection are copies and imitations of Xue Shaofu's work.

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<sup>154</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 664.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Regarding the four Chinese professions see: Ibid, p 71.

<sup>158</sup> See other bottles signed Xue Shaofu which highly resemble both styles seen under this name in the Rewi Alley Collection at: [http://snuffbottlecollector.com/xue\\_shaofu/xue\\_shao\\_fu\\_index.htm](http://snuffbottlecollector.com/xue_shaofu/xue_shao_fu_index.htm)

## Chapter Seven: Other Materials

Thus far, Part One of this thesis has outlined the histories of those materials of the snuff bottles which are most prevalent in the Rewi Alley Collection or of particular significance in the hierarchy of Chinese material culture. This final chapter of Part One will briefly explore those materials in this collection of snuff bottles which have not met these criteria, in order to offer a complete materialistic overview of these items. These materials include coral, wood, chalcedony, amber and tourmaline —though some of these are only represented through imitation.

### A. Coral

Coral is present in this collection in the stoppers of snuff bottles C1957.5 (**fig. 23b**), C1957.1322 and C1957.1323 (stoppers not photographed). Although snuff bottles themselves could be made of the material, most branches of coral were too narrow to be carved, even into the small form of a snuff bottle.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, the material was often utilised in its natural, unaltered state to decorate domestic interiors.<sup>160</sup> In the text *Yonglu Xianjie*, Zhao Zhiqian says that to avoid the challenge of finding a large enough branch for the purpose, coral snuff bottles would at times consist of more than one piece of the material; two halves sealed together rather than one flawless piece of carved coral.<sup>161</sup> Coral is also relatively brittle, so snuff bottles which were made of it could not be thinly hollowed out in case they compromised the structural integrity of the vessel.<sup>162</sup> It was far more common that coral was used for small, solid snuff bottle stoppers rather than the bottles themselves, as exemplified by the three examples in the Rewi Alley Collection.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 163.

<sup>160</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 27.

<sup>161</sup> Zhao Zhiqian, *Yonglu Xianjie*, Richard John Lynn translation in 'Research Done During Spare Time into the Realm of Yong Lu, God of the Nose' in JICSBS, Autumn 1991, p 18, cited by H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 163 and mentioned in University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 62.

<sup>162</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 164.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163.

In China, coral was valued as one of the seven Buddhist treasures along with other materials including precious metals and gemstones.<sup>164</sup> As such, it was used for items of religious significance, imbuing the material with philosophical values that would translate into other items which used the material, including snuff bottles.<sup>165</sup> Coral was also associated with longevity: in its raw form coral resembles a tree, but one which appears to be frozen in time once harvested.<sup>166</sup> As such it was prized as a symbol of immortality, and branches were sold and displayed in their original form to emphasise this.<sup>167</sup> Nevertheless, carved coral also retained this symbolism and the material was commonly used for snuff bottle stoppers as a way of integrating the allegory of longevity into the perception of the item as a whole.<sup>168</sup>

#### B. Wood

Even though the Chinese never valued wood with the same prestige they afforded jade, lacquer or bronze, they had a long history of skilfully carving the material which warranted its value through artistic merit.<sup>169</sup> The two wooden snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection, however, are not adorned with relief carving or decoration. Item C1957.1289 (**fig. 17a**) exhibits ivory panels which are the more prominently attractive feature of the snuff bottle, and the wooden bottle serves to frame these. The carved shape of this wooden bottle also reflects the shape of the ivory stopper, ensuring that the two materials work in harmony with one another. Item C1957.1292 (**figures 31a and 31b**) is also a wooden bottle, smoothly carved in the round to reveal the patterns of the grain, which

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<sup>164</sup> Jane Portal, 'Decorative Arts for Display', in Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 183.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 163.

<sup>167</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 163 and Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Biblot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 27.

<sup>168</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 163.

<sup>169</sup> Jane Portal, 'Decorative Arts for Display', in Jessica Rawson (ed.), *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art*, London, British Museum Press, 1992, p. 179.

contrast from the mottling design and darker colour of the stopper, also wooden. In this case, the juxtaposition of the two types of wood serves as the point of interest, and each can be admired for their individual colour and grain.

Being admired in this way for the material and not the craftsmanship, item C1957.1292 raises the issue that different types of wood hold precedence over others and can be evaluated as such.

Further research would need to be conducted in order to draw conclusions about this in relation to item C1957.1292, which has not been identified by the two species of wood used. In regards to the manufacture of snuff bottles in particular, Yeung Tat che suggests that sandalwood was one type of wood preferred because it enriched the flavour of the snuff.<sup>170</sup> According to him, wood was a material used for snuff bottles owned by scholars who didn't wish to flaunt wealth and were opposed to garish displays of luxury.<sup>171</sup> Whatever the case, even if a wooden snuff bottle didn't exhibit artistry through carving, the material was still admired for the colour, grain or type of wood used. This can be recognised in item C1957.1293 (**figures 32a and 32b**) which is made out of porcelain, but displays painted decorations which directly imitate woodgrain patterns. Although the vivid orange rings set against a white ceramic background make no attempt to disguise the true material of the bottle, the designs make it appear to be a wooden bottle framing painted scenes on separate panels, much like the item C1957.1289 (**fig. 17a**). In this instance, bottle C1957.1293 demonstrates how value was attributed to the natural aesthetics of wood, to the extent that painted designs might make reference to woodgrain in order to enhance the appeal of another material.

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<sup>170</sup> University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 67.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

### C. Chalcedony

Chalcedony, a material commonly used for snuff bottles, is exhibited in item C1957.1287 (**fig. 33a**) of the Rewi Alley Collection.<sup>172</sup> The term 'chalcedony' refers to "the cryptocrystalline quartz group" which can be further subdivided by the variety of colours and patterns it includes.<sup>173</sup> For the most part, items which are made out of chalcedony rely on the natural designs in the stones, the striations, for decoration rather than lapidary work of a sculptor. As such, although the material itself is not of extreme monetary value and nor is it particularly rare, the organic patterns and colours are unique to each piece and the admiration for these are the source of their worth. The Chinese had been evaluating nephrite on the basis of these qualities since the Han dynasty.<sup>174</sup> This tradition with other materials like chalcedony, therefore, makes reference to the appreciation of jade, a more highly prized material. The shaping of the chalcedony into items like snuff bottles was a project undertaken with faith that the piece would contain the attractive veins and the colours necessary to give the finished piece character and appeal. Since little could be ascertained from the surface of the pre-sculpted material, the craftsman had no control over the natural allure of the final product and the process of carving was more of a revelation of creative opportunities than an exercise of skill.<sup>175</sup>

In the eighteenth century with the popularisation of glass in China, new techniques which arose in glass workshops subsequently influenced the treatment of other materials including chalcedony.<sup>176</sup> For instance item C1957.9 (**fig. 22**) of overlay or cameo glass technique could very convincingly have been imitated in chalcedony of similar colours, seeing as the natural patterns and parti-coloured

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<sup>172</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 247.

<sup>175</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 24.

<sup>176</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 247.

segments of the stone could be left by craftsmen in high relief to carve into raised decoration.<sup>177</sup> The influence of overlay glass on chalcedony demonstrates one of the few instances in which glass was the subject of, rather than medium for, imitative work. Item C1957.1287 leaves contrasting colours and natural veins unaltered by additional carving, but does feature two taotie designs (**fig 33b**) imitating handles from ancient bronzes (discussed in the chapter on jade), thereby attempting to draw on the prestige ascribed to the more valued material.

#### D. Amber

Like coral, amber had an affiliation with longevity in the Chinese imagination. Amber takes millions of years to transform from vegetable resin into a fossilized substance, and this recognition of the role of time is something which was incorporated into the perception of the material and made it more valuable.<sup>178</sup> It also comes from trees which are now extinct, and so as an exhaustible resource the rarity of the material adds to its worth.<sup>179</sup> The two main sources of amber were first found in Burma and then along the Baltic coast of Germany, and Chinese imports of amber are generally distinguished between these two locations by colour; Baltic ambers are typically more golden or yellow while Burmese ambers are darker reds and browns.<sup>180</sup> By these criteria, the glass snuff bottle C1975.50 (**fig. 19**) in the Rewi Alley Collection imitates Baltic amber, which, according to Zhao Zhiqian, was the colour preferred in the Qing dynasty when snuff bottles were first being made.<sup>181</sup> The material was obviously evaluated by its age and colour, but also for its tactile qualities.

According to Cammann, a Chinese connoisseur would walk around with jade in one hand and amber

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<sup>177</sup> Instances of similarly coloured carved chalcedony snuff bottles bearing a resemblance to item 1957.9 can be found in H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, pp. 215, 217 and 246.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 489.

<sup>179</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 30 and H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 489.

<sup>180</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 499 and Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 31.

<sup>181</sup> Zhao Zhiqian, *Yonglu xianjie*, Richard John Lynn translation in 'Research Done During Spare Time into the Realm of Yong Lu, God of the Nose' in JICSBS, Autumn 1991, p. 18, cited by H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 499.



in the other in order to maintain his appreciation for the subtleties of the tangible universe.<sup>182</sup> In this respect, amber is equal to jade in terms of tactile appreciation.

#### E. Tourmaline

Also made of glass, the stopper of snuff bottle C1957.1283 (**fig. 20**) imitates the pink variety of tourmaline. The cracks and sand particles in the crystal make the material difficult to carve without shattering so, like coral, tourmaline is generally used for stoppers rather than snuff bottles.<sup>183</sup> That being said, Heshen's collection of snuff bottles (one of the largest and most famous in history) contained three hundred tourmaline snuff bottles, indicating that the material could be extensively used for items larger than stoppers.<sup>184</sup> Tourmaline was imported into China from all around the world and was prized for the variety of colours it could exhibit, often in the same crystal, or for the distinctive black needles and inclusions it could sometimes have.<sup>185</sup> Although the material was accessible during the entire history of snuff bottle manufacture, tourmaline was used especially for the later collectors' market of the late nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>186</sup> This was in an attempt to make bottles which appealed to foreigners by using precious materials that were visually striking. The extravagant pink and green painted decoration of the snuff bottle C1957.1283 is made to accentuate the colour of the accompanying stopper. Considering this, it might very well be the case that the bottle was made specifically for the collector's market.

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<sup>182</sup> Schuyler Cammann, *Miniature Art from Old China: Chinese Snuff Bottles from the Montclair Art Museum Collections*, Montclair, NJ: Montclair Art Museum, 1982, p. 48, cited by H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol II, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 489.

<sup>183</sup> Regarding the fragility of the tourmaline crystal: University of Hong Kong, *One Thousand Snuff Bottles*, Hong Kong, One Thousand Snuff Bottles House, 1995, p. 60. Regarding the popularity of tourmaline stoppers over snuff bottles: H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 136.

<sup>184</sup> Hugh. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 136.

<sup>185</sup> Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 19.

<sup>186</sup> Regarding the availability of tourmaline: Hugh M. Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 19. Regarding the foreign collector's market: H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 136.

## Part Two

## Chapter One: The Value of Snuffing as an Elite Practise

Having seen in Part One how the greater history of materials within China informed the value of snuff bottles, Part Two looks at value of snuff bottles in a social capacity, and the ways in which these roles did or did not change over time.

Snuff taking and the practical use of snuff bottles were socially significant elements of court life in the Qing dynasty. Tobacco was popular in China ever since its arrival around the end of the sixteenth century, but it was most commonly smoked through a pipe.<sup>187</sup> Smoking was practised by both genders, and was available to people of all classes and every age, including children.<sup>188</sup> An unknown author writing towards the end of the Ming dynasty during the Chongzhen era (1628-43) observed, “there was hardly a boy three feet tall who did not smoke tobacco”.<sup>189</sup> As a popular and lavish substance, tobacco was morally condemned and unsuccessfully prohibited several times during the seventeenth century.<sup>190</sup> For instance in 1639 the selling of tobacco was punishable by decapitation, and yet capital official Yang Shicong noted that there were “tobaccanists on every street corner” when he visited the capital in 1642.<sup>191</sup> Smoking was banned once again in 1676, but *only* in the palace.<sup>192</sup> As a result, snuffing was adopted by courtiers initially out of necessity as a substitute for smoking.

Prior to this, snuff was reserved for therapeutic purposes. One of the four great Chinese novels set in the Qing dynasty, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, makes mention of snuff’s remedial part in alleviating

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<sup>187</sup> “The Chinese began smoking tobacco at some time between the end of the sixteenth century and the 1620s.” H. Moss *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 12.

<sup>188</sup> Timothy Brook, ‘Smoking in Imperial China’ in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, (ed.) Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, London, Reaktion Books, 2004, p. 84: “Kangxi probably picked up a pipe before his seventh birthday”, p. 88: “An Englishman writing in 1878 noted: “it is the fashion for girls of even eight or nine years of age to have as an appendage to their dress a silken purse of pocket to hold the pipe and tobacco to which they aspire, even if they do not already use them” ”.

<sup>189</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 4.

<sup>190</sup> Timothy Brook, ‘Smoking in Imperial China’ in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, (ed.) Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, London, Reaktion Books, 2004, pp. 84-85.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p. 85.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

symptoms of the common cold.<sup>193</sup> Laufer specifies that snuff was commonly used to treat “pain in the eyes, toothache, throat-trouble, asthma, and constipation.”<sup>194</sup> However snuff could contain any variety of additional powdered ingredients of medicinal benefit. Although Laufer points out particular illnesses to which snuffing was prescribed as a cure, he also says that snuff could simply be used as “the vehicle of conveying other medicinal agents into the system.”<sup>195</sup> The brief nicotine surge of snuffing served as a suitable alternative means of tobacco ingestion, and it became equally recreational and remedial. One Qing poem portrays the rising fondness for snuff:

Unsatisfied gluttony brings endless sickness;  
Searching everywhere for a good prescription I find a distant friend;  
It is not known that this kind of tobacco can cure a sickness;  
However, it makes my nostrils also greedy for more<sup>196</sup>

This poem by official-scholar-painter Wu Li was written in 1684; the year the ban on smoking in the palace was lifted. It expresses how the craving for snuff was becoming superior to its possible medicinal properties in the time when smoking had been banned.

Snuffing instead of smoking in the palace reflected a legal limitation that pertained to a particular place and class of people. However, within this environment, snuff-taking inevitably acquired the status of its courtly practitioners and turned into an expression of exclusivity. Even after the ban on smoking in the palace was revised in 1684 (the edict now cautioning against careless smoking which could cause fires), snuffing remained a habit popular only among those connected to the court for nearly a century.<sup>197</sup> This is evident in the geographical and social spread of the practise throughout

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<sup>193</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 31.

<sup>194</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 34.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 30.

<sup>197</sup> Timothy Brook, 'Smoking in Imperial China' in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, (ed.) Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, London, Reaktion Books, 2004, p. 84.

China. Until the late eighteenth century, snuffing was confined mainly to the Northern areas of China near Beijing and the court.<sup>198</sup> Prior to this, notable exceptions of snuff being used or snuff bottles being gifted from further south in the country demonstrate connections of individuals to the Beijing court. For instance Wu Li, author of the poem above, was a famous Qing dynasty painter who had frequented the court before detailing his use of snuff in Macau.<sup>199</sup> In 1710, Li Xu, a Textile Commissioner in Suzhou, sent snuff bottles as part of a gift to the Kangxi emperor.<sup>200</sup> Cao Xueqin, author of *The Dream of the Red Chamber* which references the taking of snuff, was part of a family which also held the office of the Textile Commissioner (in Nanjing) for three generations.<sup>201</sup> It is possible that the duties of this profession had brought both Li Xu and Cao Xueqin into contact with the habits of snuff-taking in the court. It is evident that it was not only courtiers and officials from Beijing that were among the first to use and gift snuff in China, but also artists and wealthy individuals who had reason to frequent the court.

It was during its early usage in the 1660s to 1680s that specific systems for the etiquette of snuff were established.<sup>202</sup> To take snuff, a pinch was extracted with the spatula attached to the lid of the snuff bottle, and either tapped out onto the nail or back of the thumb or lifted directly from the spatula to the nose. George Leonard Staunton observed how little deviation had been made from this method nearly a century later:

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<sup>198</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, pp. 29-30.

<sup>199</sup> Although Wu Li is only known to have stayed in Beijing in the year of 1670 before the ban on smoking popularised snuff in the court, the "distant friend" he refers to in the poem possibly describes snuff or the practise of snuffing as a souvenir from afar. Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 30.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, pp. 30-31.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

A Mandarin [sic] is seldom without a small ornamental phial to hold his snuff, of which he occasionally pours a quantity, equal to a pinch, upon the back of his left hand, between the thumb and the index, which approaching to his nose he snuffs up several times a day.<sup>203</sup>

For the individual, snuff was used for its medicinal properties or was taken after a heavy dinner, presumably to aid digestion.<sup>204</sup> It was also convenient to have on one's person to guard against the dust and odours of the city.<sup>205</sup> But much like smoking in the West, snuffing after a meal or on the street presented opportunities to partake and share the substance with others.<sup>206</sup> If hosting a dinner, snuff might be ladled onto small plates so lumps could be broken apart and the substance passed around after guests had eaten.<sup>207</sup> Women used snuff only at home, but when a man encountered a friend or acquaintance in public, it would be common courtesy for him to present his snuff bottle and offer a sniff of snuff.<sup>208</sup>

In addition to proper etiquette as to when, how and with whom snuff was taken; means of evaluating the substance was also established. The quality of snuff could be determined on the basis of colour and scent. One of the purposes of sharing snuff on dishes for circulation among guests after dinner was to more clearly exhibit its attractive colours and aromas for admiration.<sup>209</sup> As expressed by Ho, "For serious tobacco sniffers, it was essential to have a number of snuff containers for different flavours and social occasions".<sup>210</sup> According to a source from the early eighteenth

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<sup>203</sup> G. L. Staunton, *Embassy to China. An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain*, London, 1797-1798, cited by H. Moss *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14

<sup>204</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 34.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 159.

<sup>207</sup> In reference to the use of snuff dishes: Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 28. In reference to the use of snuff after a meal: Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 35 and Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 29.

<sup>208</sup> In reference to the distinction between male and female usage of snuff: William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 159. In reference to the use of snuff in public greeting: H. Moss *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 15.

<sup>209</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 35.

<sup>210</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 159.

century, snuff from Canton was assessed by colour: “It is manufactured in five different colors, that of apple color taking the first rank.”<sup>211</sup> Laufer specifies of those snuffs used in the palace, “That of duck-green color was esteemed most highly, that of rose colour ranked next, and that of soy color came third”.<sup>212</sup> He also explains that in terms of aromas; mint, camphor, jasmine and essence of roses were basic flavours for concoctions of snuff.<sup>213</sup> It was not unusual for a family or individual to pride themselves on one particular snuff recipe, attained either through wealth or experimentation. For instance a brother to the Qianlong emperor had a talent for inventing new snuff mixtures.<sup>214</sup> Wu Li, the painter who wrote of snuff in the poem above, was also known for favouring snuff of his own concoction.<sup>215</sup>

Nearly a century later, wealthy users were still finding new ways of assessing the quality of snuff. Once the habit had been in China for a considerable time, snuff was valued for its age in a manner similar to fine wine. Old snuff was “stored in big glass jars of the same period” to validate its age.<sup>216</sup> Laufer speculates that the preference for aging snuff was limited to wealthy officials as a luxury, seeing as it was not a quality commonly pursued by the general user.<sup>217</sup> It is possible that in this time after the practise of snuffing had spread beyond the court, cherishing old snuff was one way that the high-class practitioner exhibited an elevated taste for the substance. This demonstrates the popularity of snuff with multiple classes, as it was continually reworked over the centuries into new systems of value which could reflect individual wealth and social standing. In this way, the increased accessibility and use of snuff did not diminish the sophistication of the practise for the upper classes.

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<sup>211</sup> Laufer calls the source from the early eighteenth century *Hsiang tsu pi ki*, but this is possibly referring to Wang Shih-chen’s *Hsiang-tsu pi-chi* (Notes from the Orchid Studio) in *Ch’ing-tai pi-chi ts’ung-k’an* (A Collection of Notes on the Qing dynasty). Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p. 33.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p 159.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Berthold Laufer, *Tobacco and its use in Asia*, Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History: Department of Anthropology, 1924, p 34.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two: Snuff Bottles as Gifts and Political Currency

As we have seen in Part One of this thesis, snuff bottles were extensively admired and valued by their users; even more than the snuff inside. As Goodman notes, the Chinese “created a highly distinctive ritual involving not only exquisitely produced snuffs but also delicately designed bottles as containers”.<sup>218</sup> As snuffing became a habit of personal delight for the social elite, so too did snuff bottles start to reflect this pleasure. They became more than just a container, but served as the ideal object for displaying wealth and taste, and were much coveted by their users. As explained by Tsang and Moss, the social function of the snuff bottle made it “ideally suited to the task of delicately impressing friends and associates as it passes from hand to hand”.<sup>219</sup> Snuff takers amassed extensive collections of bottles, as “wealthy courtiers vied with each other for the finest and most unusual and followed their rulers in the practise of acquisition on a grand scale”.<sup>220</sup> It was not unusual for bottles to be collected in their hundreds or even thousands. For instance, Heshen, infamous advisor to the Qianlong emperor, had accumulated 2,390 snuff bottles by the time he passed away in 1799.<sup>221</sup> Such a number seems feasible when the totality of Heshen’s artistic collection is taken into account; the snuff bottles accounted for only one of the one hundred and nine inventories detailing his possessions.<sup>222</sup>

As the habit of emperors, snuff was entirely appropriate and often recommended as a gift for the socially elite. Already in the 1680s, foreign missionaries had sent snuff (with no mention of bottles) among other items as a gift to the Kangxi emperor during their journey from the court to the south of China.<sup>223</sup> The emperor returned all but the snuff, “the acceptance of which meets our

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<sup>218</sup> Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*, London, Routledge, 1993, p. 88

<sup>219</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 27.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Hugh Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>222</sup> Clare Chu, ‘Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting’, *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p. 6.

<sup>223</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 28.



approval”.<sup>224</sup> Other international parties also made gifts of snuff as the habit of Qing court became known to foreign powers throughout the world. The Kangxi emperor received a gift of Portuguese snuff from the Russian embassy in 1719.<sup>225</sup> Pope Benedict XIII gifted snuff to the Yongzheng emperor in 1725, and the King of Portugal sent snuff both to the Yongzheng (in 1728) and Qianlong emperors (in 1752).<sup>226</sup> In many of these instances of international exchange during the Qing dynasty, snuff was seen as the valued commodity. However within China, the exchanges regarding snuff became increasingly focused on snuff bottles.

As a small, fashionable luxury, the snuff bottle was quickly recognised as an ideal gift. Just as sharing snuff with others had naturally developed into a daily social practise, so too did the exchange of bottles develop into a normal aspect of gift-giving in China. Even the Kangxi emperor would present snuff bottles as tokens of appreciation and affection. After accompanying the emperor on a journey to the north in 1703, Wang Hao was given “a glass bottle of snuff by the prince”.<sup>227</sup> Also in 1703, Gao shiqi , who had aided the Kangxi emperor in his poetry and calligraphy, received a gift of the emperor’s “personal snuff bottle and snuff”.<sup>228</sup> The more intimate description of this second gift perhaps reflects the close nature of the friendship between the two men, especially considering the bottle was given to the ageing Gao shiqi in the last year of his life.<sup>229</sup> In these examples it becomes clear that snuff bottles were equally suitable for standard gifts as they were for more meaningful encounters.

What quickly followed was the development of the snuff bottle into a new form of political currency. The emperor, who had no need to curry favour, used snuff bottles as symbols of recognition and

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<sup>224</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>228</sup> In reference to Gao shiqi as helper to the Kangxi emperor: Adele Schlombs, *Huai-su and the Beginnings of Wild Cursive Script in Chinese Calligraphy*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart, 1998, p. 98. In reference to the quote by Gao shiqi: Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>229</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 28.

friendship, endorsing this practise in the court. However to a greater extent, the courtiers also used snuff bottles for their own purposes as a means of bribery. As put by Tsang and Moss:

Costly, small, exquisite and enormously fashionable in the right places, it is little wonder that the purchase of favour and influence should have involved this polite currency, leading to the acquisition of vast collections by those with the greatest influence to sell.<sup>230</sup>

Bottles were delivered as a means of introduction for those wishing to secure an audience with an official of higher rank.<sup>231</sup> They were sent to secure favours or as a means of bribery.<sup>232</sup> Especially in the years of the Qianlong emperor's reign (1736-1796), the exchange of snuff bottles in this manner thrived. As patrons of both snuffing and the arts, the Qianlong emperor and his advisor Heshen set the example of collecting bottles in vast quantities. Moss remarks of the pair, "When the two most important people in China began to collect snuff bottles, those with ambitious tendencies did likewise."<sup>233</sup> As a standardised gift for buying favour in the court, snuff bottles assumed the role of securing one's individual privilege and career; encouraging relationships for the purposes of networking rather than fondness.

The role of snuff bottles in this capacity is perfectly demonstrated in a story about the official Heshen. In it, he encountered a minister by the name of Sun Shiyi who was on his way to present a snuff bottle to the emperor.<sup>234</sup> Intrigued, Heshen asked to see the gift and was so enchanted by the bottle "which was made from a large and beautiful pearl", that he asked Sun to give it to him instead; a request that Sun refused.<sup>235</sup> Sometime later Heshen crossed paths with Sun once more and smugly brought forward his new "treasure" which was in fact the very same bottle. Sun was

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<sup>230</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 32.

<sup>231</sup> Hugh Moss *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>232</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 27.

<sup>233</sup> Hugh Moss *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>234</sup> Clare Chu, 'Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p. 6.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

astonished and figured that the emperor had passed the bottle on to Heshen, when in fact Heshen had paid a eunuch to steal it.<sup>236</sup> The story demonstrates that the exchange of snuff bottles in the Qianlong court was not unusual; Sun aimed to present such a gift to the emperor for reasons that are not specified and later assumed the bottle had been redistributed by the emperor to his favourite minister. Whether this was an indication of the emperor's approval or disapproval of the snuff bottle is unclear; what is certain is that the movement of bottles in the court was fluid. What is also apparent is that Heshen, one of the most influential advocates for the development of snuff bottle exchange at this time, was dishonest and corrupt, even towards the emperor. This helps to emphasise the environment in which snuff bottles were being used for the purposes of bribery, and the kind of example being set by one of the most famous snuff bottle collectors.

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<sup>236</sup> This and previous quotes from Ibid.

### Chapter Three: The Popularisation of Snuff and its Effect on Snuff Bottles

Snuff bottles began to make an appearance in artistic representations of the era, featuring in paintings with wealthy and fashionable commissioners. According to Chu, during the snuff bottle's earliest use in China, emperors were "on occasion, caught with a favourite bottle by their side in a painting, typically depicted at leisure in a garden setting."<sup>237</sup> Paintings of this sort were not merely portraits, but part of a genre that captured eighteenth-century men of power in pursuit of luxurious activities.<sup>238</sup> In the garden setting, courtiers would drink tea or wine, write poetry and appreciate the collections and antiques of their companions.<sup>239</sup> Snuff would have easily been adopted into this scene as snuffing became a court-favoured activity and as snuff bottles became increasingly desirable as an artistic collector's item. By the end of the century the appearance of snuff bottles extended beyond representations of the court. As Ho describes:

A painting dated to 1786 illustrates a young *hong* merchant dressed in a court outfit holding a white snuff bottle with its lid on. The passion for snuff bottles persisted and seems to have become part of the public image of a well-to-do Chinese male.<sup>240</sup>

This painting foreshadows the following decades during which snuff-taking was adopted by members of other classes, such as merchants. As the use of snuff bottles spread, they were soon considered to be a regular part of a gentleman's attire.<sup>241</sup>

By the 1790s and into the nineteenth century there is sufficient evidence to suggest that snuff bottles were becoming popular in China beyond the Northern territories and the Peking court. Bottles are mentioned several times in works following the Macartney Embassy of 1793-4; writers such as Staunton (previously quoted) claimed that a Chinese man was "seldom without" a snuff

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<sup>237</sup> Clare Chu, 'Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> William Watson and Chuimei Ho, *The Arts of China After 1620*, London, Yale University Press, 2007, p. 159.

<sup>241</sup> R. Soame Jenyns, *Chinese Art: The Minor Arts II*, New York, Universe Books, 1965, p. 295.

bottle.<sup>242</sup> Sir John Francis Davis, who had spent a great deal of time in the South of China as Governor of Hong Kong, made the same observation in the late 1830s: “the Chinese is seldom seen without his snuff-bottle”.<sup>243</sup> There are many more sources pertaining to the popularity and locales of snuff-taking in the South around this time, most of them written by foreigners. They are found in the accounts of travellers in China, making notes about the peculiarities of the country which the Chinese might have considered too commonplace for comment. The first mention by a Chinese source that snuff bottle production had spread to the southern regions of China comes from 1774.<sup>244</sup> In it, a list of everyday items made at Jingdezhen (the mecca of porcelain manufacture in China) mentions “candle-snuff receptacles”, which is presumed to be referring to snuff bottles.<sup>245</sup> It wasn’t until the practice of snuffing was diminishing in the late nineteenth century that a Chinese study on the topic was published in 1869.<sup>246</sup>

The reason for the popularisation of snuff throughout China is as unclear as the reason for its long confinement to the elite in the preceding century. It is possible that the surge of snuff bottle collecting and production inspired during the reign of the Qianlong emperor (ending 1796) was significant enough that it could no longer escape the attention of those outside the court.<sup>247</sup>

Whatever the case, it was during this turn into the nineteenth century that a drastic shift occurred in the history of snuff bottles when snuffing became a habit for the general populace. The significance of this is primarily in the increased production of snuff bottles, a majority of which it is presumed were made during this later stage. As more regions got involved in their manufacture, snuff bottles were made out of more materials than ever before. According to Tsang and Moss, materials from the South such as:

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<sup>242</sup> Hugh Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>243</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, pp. 34-5.

<sup>244</sup> Hugh Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 14.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch’ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, pp. 37-8.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p 34.

mother-of-pearl and cocoanut-shell; and the potteries at l'hsing [Yixing] in Kiangsu [Jiangsu] province, famous since the Ming dynasty for teapots, turned their attention, for the first time, to the production of snuff bottles.<sup>248</sup>

The porcelain industry in Jingdezhen (as previously mentioned) also began to incorporate snuff bottles as a regular product. The significant number of extant porcelain snuff bottles, which were only made in the last years of the Qianlong era, attests to the popularity of snuffing at this time when it was spreading to the whole of China.<sup>249</sup>

The shift in social spheres for snuffing also had a significant impact on the bottles in terms of craftsmanship. Production extended beyond the court ateliers, bringing about two results. The first was that more accessible bottles were being produced in greater quantities and out of cheaper materials. Many of these bottles were commercial in nature; replicas with little artistic merit simply catering to public demand. The second result was the seemingly paradoxical movement towards artistic innovation and recognition. Inside-painted snuff bottles appeared at this time, exhibiting a material that was economical but a process that was both a technical and creative challenge.

Individual artists working in this media became known; signing their bottles as a painter would sign a canvas. The most famous of these, as discussed in chapter six on inside painting, went on to form or inspire studios. Likewise in the porcelain arts, workshops and craftsmen labelled their products with seals and signatures, advertising their specialities to attract new patrons. The artist was no longer an anonymous party to the snuff bottle phenomenon, and focus shifted from those giving and receiving the items to those creating them.

In tandem with craftsmanship, the new sponsorship of snuff bottles had various effects on the products as well. As snuffing became common-place for the masses, the court no longer dictated the fashion and artistic development of snuff bottles (though their influence was still relevant). It is

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

proposed by Moss and Sargent that the last surge of this change in Chinese patronage coincides with the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), a period that saw the destruction of many snuff-bottle manufacturing sites which were used by the court, such as Jingdezhen.<sup>250</sup> In the years following the Rebellion when snuff bottle production was restored, “wealthy merchants, scholars, and local officials finally replaced the court as arbiters of taste”.<sup>251</sup> The difference here with the beginning of the nineteenth century is that snuff users of a different class were now *setting* the precedent, not simply following it. In this period, “those who were broadly cultured and able to contribute in a world of ancient texts, collecting and art appreciation found doors open to them among the urban elite.”<sup>252</sup> This emerging group—founded on “cultural capital” rather than lineage and courtly affiliation—began setting the vogue of snuff bottle development and appreciation.<sup>253</sup>

Like craftsmen and artists at this time, these new collectors of snuff bottles were also beginning to mark the items as their own. Some of the more creative collectors preferred to decorate bottles themselves, demonstrating their knowledge and appreciation for the arts by inscribing ancient poems on bottles made of newer, cheaper and more malleable materials which they were unafraid to manipulate.<sup>254</sup> Collector’s courtesy names were also carved into snuff bottles to signify they were part of an individual’s collection. Brothers Li Peizhen and Li Peisong are better known by their collector’s names Weizhi and Li Yungting, which they had carved onto a number of snuff bottles in their collection at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>255</sup> Identification by means of reign marks had been common in products of the palace ateliers or commissioned for the court in previous centuries,

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<sup>250</sup> H. Moss and S. Sargent, ‘The World in a Bottle in the World at the End of the Qing Empire. Part 1: New Patrons, New Artists’, *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLII, no. 3, Winter, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>253</sup> “This power was the cultural capital that a person accumulated through education and expressed in literary or artistic achievement” Ibid, p. 4. Also: “The common aspiration of the new elite patrons of the snuff bottle was cultural, based not only upon education in the long-accepted manner, providing access to the imperial examination system and to service the court, but upon a common understanding of the ancient culture.” Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p 5.

<sup>255</sup> Clare Chu, ‘Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting’, *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p 8.

and personal hallmarks were still being applied by courtly owners of snuff bottles. Prince Zaiquan (the fifth Prince Ding, 1794–1854) used collector’s marks, many of which are different in appearance, stamped onto the bottles in his extensive collection.<sup>256</sup> The indication here is that, unlike his predecessors who had regular “mark-writers in the palace workshops”, Prince Zaiquan had to request this personalisation through the several different studios from which he was ordering bottles.<sup>257</sup> This demonstrates that even courtly collectors had turned to manufacturers outside of the palace workshops, considering them to be the leaders of snuff bottle production at this time.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Four: The Collectors' Item

At this point in the second half of the nineteenth century, the final and most significant shift in the history of snuff bottles occurred: their role as utilitarian objects was completely replaced by their non-functional role as collectors' items. Snuff bottles had always been collected in large numbers. As previously discussed, the elite could easily afford the luxury and they established traditions of frequent exchange around this particular item, leading to the accumulation of hundreds or thousands of bottles, not all of which would have been used. As production of snuff bottles increased to cater to the entire nation, similarly large assortments of bottles were incorporated into the collections of the urban elite as artefacts and artistic marvels. Owners would sometimes endeavour to decorate their own snuff bottles or brand them with seals bearing their chosen collector's name. These patrons clearly viewed snuff bottles as expressions of identity; their extensive procurement and declaration of ownership reflects the rising prioritisation of these bottles to be interpreted as collected items.

This attitude was only encouraged by the new involvement of foreign collectors. Since snuff-taking had spread throughout the country it was more easily noticed by foreigners, as evidenced by the number of Western accounts on the subject which appeared in the nineteenth century.<sup>258</sup> As small containers being made in increasingly affordable materials, they were ideal souvenirs which were easily acquired and travelled well. They also held a certain fascination amongst foreigners in particular. There were, of course, those interests which they shared with the Chinese snuff bottle collector, such as aesthetic appreciation and connections with antiquity. But the bottles also of ethnographic significance; they served as microcosms of broader art-forms within China and were peculiar to the Chinese as snuff-takers. This made the bottles exotic curiosities, and the non-snuff-taking foreigner acquired them purely for the sake of collecting without the intention of using them.

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<sup>258</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, pp. 34-5.

As overseas collectors took a keen interest in snuff bottles they inspired a market which focussed on aesthetic and historic appeal. For instance more Chinese wares were produced at this time with marks from much earlier eras to mislead uninformed travellers into purchasing false antiques. Some porcelain snuff bottles even bore Kangxi or Yongzheng reign marks, which was impossible given that the porcelain industry only became involved in snuff bottle manufacture in the late Qianlong era.<sup>259</sup> The growing foreign snuff bottle market was even being catered to outside of China. In the 1850's, trade with the United States made the Japanese aware of the American interest in snuff bottles, the demands of which the Japanese aimed to satisfy. As explained by Moss,

The result was a flood of collectors' bottles, produced to the extraordinary standards of artistry of Meiji craftsmen, ranging from outright fakes and pastiches to innovative types and styles, some even honestly signed by their Japanese makers<sup>260</sup>

While at first the Japanese acquired Chinese bottles which they then sold to foreign buyers, this mercantile role evolved into a process where old bottles were augmented with local materials and artistry, as Moss notes.<sup>261</sup> Clearly the aesthetic advantage to this method was believed to be worth compromising the bottles' historic integrity.

The main development in light of the new foreign market was, as previously stated, the turning point after which snuff bottles were viewed mainly as collectors' items. What is striking about this is that for the first time snuff bottles were intentionally made never to be used. As discussed by Tsang and Moss, this impacted their design:

there was no point in wasting a good deal of time hollowing a bottle carefully if it was never to be use [sic]. Outward appearance seemed to be all that interested many of these

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<sup>259</sup> H. Moss, 'Response and Responsibility', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XXXVII, no. 3, Winter, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

collectors and it wasn't long before craftsmen catered to the changed taste and produced works with little hollowing and often impractical and flamboyant relief work.<sup>262</sup>

Despite the fact that the aspiration to collect snuff bottles was not new, nor had it been likely that all bottles in a collection were used, in the eighteenth century every bottle had at least been made with the *possibility* of use.<sup>263</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the Chinese snuff bottle actually underwent a change in physical form which made it highly impractical to carry snuff and its utilitarian purpose was lost once and for all.<sup>264</sup>

The collectors' or cabinet bottle therefore drove the snuff bottle market onward even as the habit of snuff-taking declined. Thomas Child observed that as a practice in the late nineteenth century China, snuffing was not "indulged in to any extent by people who were slaves to the habit and could not do without it, but it is rather an elegant luxury".<sup>265</sup> Unlike the smoking of tobacco, snuffing appears not to have held power over its users as an addictive substance, which makes the repurposed role of snuff bottles as non-functional items all the more plausible. That being said, additional information is provided in one valuable account given by a Manchu princess who resided in the Forbidden City until 1924.<sup>266</sup> Having been raised under the Empress Dowager, the princess's account offers observations of the inner workings of the imperial court around the demise of the Qing dynasty. She suggests that the Xianfeng emperor (ruled 1850-1861) *was* in fact addicted to snuff, but that such a dependency was in itself unusual, and his was an exceptional case. More prevalent than snuffing, according to her testimony, was the "long imperial tradition" of snuff bottle collecting.

Snuff-taking did, however, survive to the end of the Qing dynasty, taking on a new form which was structured within the more important framework of collecting. The remainder of the Manchu princess's description on the matter offers her witness of snuff taking in the imperial court.

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<sup>262</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 39.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

According to her account, snuff was still stored in the bottles and occasionally an owner would remove it from its container to be scented overnight before “they went through all the motions of snuff taking...playing with the associated trappings” including “all the paraphernalia, the dishes, fillers, funnels” which they collected in addition to the bottles. The princess claimed that the Empress Dowager was one such participant in this ritualised imitation of snuff-taking, though while she “played at snuffing”, women in particular tended not to actually use snuff at all.<sup>267</sup> This account shows how the prioritisation of snuff bottle collecting had fully reinterpreted the social life and practical use of the object. Instead of carrying a bottle about on one’s person and using it as a form of greeting or at social settings like a dinner or in a leisure garden, the collector hoarded them away to be used almost ceremonially for personal entertainment. Snuffing had become a pre-meditated performance, carefully enacted in a way which celebrated past customs without actually continuing them. They served the private delight of the collector. In a sense, this kind of play-snuffing preserved the original guise of the habit as the practise declined, formalising the actions even to the point that snuff was not necessarily ingested.

Elsewhere throughout the world as both the Qing dynasty and snuff-taking traditions came to a close, snuff bottles were making their appearance in all manner of foreign auctions, exhibitions and collections. One of the first was the modest pair of snuff bottles sold by the London showroom Christie’s in 1857 as part of the larger collection of Robert Fortune, a horticulturalist who during his travels in 1843 and 1845 made notes on the antique shops of Canton which were selling snuff bottles.<sup>268</sup> Sir William Bragge displayed a greater number of snuff bottles at the Oriental Exhibition of the Liverpool Arts Club in 1872; these were a part of his collection of tobacco-related paraphernalia from around the world.<sup>269</sup> Around seventy bottles were exhibited in an 1894 catalogue printed by

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<sup>267</sup> This and previous quotes from Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, pp. 38-39.

<sup>269</sup> Hugh Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 15.

the American collector George A. Hearn, Secretary of Legation and Acting U.S. Minister in Beijing.<sup>270</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s, international interest in pre-Qing artefacts revived collectors' and museums' notice of Chinese antiques in general and soon the snuff bottle proved to be the economic and portable choice for global exchange.<sup>271</sup> The prolific Swiss collector Alfred Baur amassed five hundred and fifty six snuff bottles, mostly purchased from 1922-1928, fifty two of which he acquired during a trip to China and the rest procured from the dealers Thomas Blow of England and Tomita Kumasaku of Japan.<sup>272</sup> Upon his death in 1951, Baur's snuff bottles were distributed as per his request to three separate institutions, each donation serving as a substantial collection in spite of the division.<sup>273</sup>

One Western fiction of unknown origin describes the fascination with snuff bottles in the nineteenth century and how the preoccupation with the items came at the compromise of rationality. In the tale a man with a sharp, observant nature spots a porcelain snuff bottle on the person of one unknown friend of an acquaintance. The bottle displays a beautifully painted magpie which the man admires from a distance. The second time he encounters the owner he spies the bottle again, except notes that the number of magpies on it has changed, thus spiking his curiosity. He introduces himself and expresses his captivation, insisting on inspecting the bottle himself and arranging an appointment to view it again. During this later visit the man realises that every time he examines the bottle the number of birds it displays correlates with the day of the month. Enchanted, he appeals to the owner for an explanation, but no further light is shed on the situation; the owner saying the bottle had been passed down throughout his family for generations and no one remembered how it worked. Eager to purchase it off him the man negotiates with the owner until a price in gold is agreed upon and the exchange is finally made. However the following day the man was disappointed

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<sup>270</sup> Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Snuff Bottles of the Ch'ing Dynasty: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Festival of Asian Arts*, Hong Kong, The Urban Council, 1978, p. 39.

<sup>271</sup> Clare Chu, 'Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>272</sup> Clare Chu, 'Addiction—The Psychology of Collecting', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, vol. XLIV, no. 2, Autumn, 2012, p. 9.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

to find that the bottle has the same number of birds on it as it had the day before. In reality, his obsession with the bottle had dulled his wit and he was conned into buying only one of a set of thirty one bottles.

Two important things are conveyed through this story. The first is that the adoration of snuff bottles at this time was such that they warranted association with what at first appears to be magical properties, even if this is only accomplished through self-proclaimed fiction. The second is that snuff bottles are portrayed as objects which please the eye and delight the mind to the extent that they rouse a passion for acquisition which can turn even a sensible man into a fool. In particular this second lesson is emphasised by Chu who used this story in her work, *Addiction-The Psychology of Collecting*, to demonstrate that:

The rationality of possession is central to the belief that life is logical and sensible. In actuality one's relationship with one's possessions is far from reasonable and the more that an object is desired, the more unreasonable that relationship becomes.<sup>274</sup>

It is unfortunate that little background for this story can be provided beyond the century in which it is set, as further information might offer perspective as to the social and historical context in which it was written. Regardless it offers a fair demonstration of what is, perhaps with intentional irony known as "magpie mania"; the agitation collectors might experience in the process of acquisition.<sup>275</sup>

In China the decades following the end of the Qing dynasty were too turbulent to warrant much in the way of artistic development and the popularity of the snuff-bottle tradition died out almost completely.<sup>276</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s a Communist programme sought to remedy this by reviving those crafts which had expired but remained within living memory.<sup>277</sup> They provided studios, materials, and sponsored apprentices for those craftsmen who had made snuff bottles in the

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> H. Moss, V. Graham, K.B. Tsang, *The Art of the Chinese Snuff Bottle: The J&J Collection*, Vol I, New York, Weatherhill, 1993, p. 8.

<sup>276</sup> Hugh Moss, *Snuff Bottles of China*, London, Bibelot Publishers Limited, 1971, p. 15.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

generation before the revolution.<sup>278</sup> The brothers Ye Xiaofeng (c. 1912-unknown) and Ye Pengqi (c. 1920-unknown) for instance, were sought out to lead a new school of inside-painted snuff bottles.<sup>279</sup> By the 1970s there were six students working under their tutelage.<sup>280</sup> While the school turned out impeccably reproduced bottles, no attempts were made by these artists to disguise the time of production.<sup>281</sup> They were openly claimed as the works of individuals such as student Wang Xisan, whose artistic accomplishments were as highly acclaimed as his predecessors.<sup>282</sup>

Mapping the transformation of the snuff bottle from a functional, purpose-built utensil into an artistic object, a coveted and finally purely aesthetic relic is a way of understanding its social history. However this perspective only recognises the evolution of the *primary* role of snuff bottles and fails to take into account one purpose which has remained unchanged throughout its history; their role as gifts. As previously discussed, bottles were exchanged between individuals to affirm relationships, be they affectionate or more ambitious in motivation. This could also be seen on a grander scale between institutions, governments, rulers and nations. Such was the case in an aforementioned gift of snuff and its paraphernalia from Pope Benedict XIII to the Yongzheng emperor in 1725, which was sent to celebrate the latter's newly attained imperial position.<sup>283</sup> This would have served as a courtesy to establish good relations between international powers at the start of a new reign. However, twice before in the previous twenty years these intentions for snuff bottle exchange had not been so benevolent. Control over both Chinese Catholics and Jesuit missionaries in Beijing was sought by embassies sent from Rome, each bearing tributes of snuff for the Kangxi emperor to facilitate their operation.<sup>284</sup> In both cases, snuff exchange was initiated with the expectation of reciprocity by means of co-operation.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, pp. 61-62.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>283</sup> Carol Benedict, *Golden-Silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1150-2000*, London, University of California Press, 2011, pp. 113-4.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

Global powers recognised the appeal of snuff in China during the Qing dynasty and used this knowledge to pander to the tastes of their intended recipients in order to garner favour. The Chinese were likewise using snuff and snuff bottles to acknowledge and uphold their relationships with other nations and peoples. The Qianlong emperor commissioned as many as five hundred imperially-made glass snuff bottles for his trip to Chengde in 1755, where he used them to thank and encourage the support of Mongolians who were aiding his defence against the Dzungar.<sup>285</sup> The Mongolians, having likely introduced snuff to China some centuries previously, were avid users and eager recipients of the substance. It is interesting to note that snuff-taking never died out in Mongolia as it did in China. One study made by Thomas Lyall in 2012 shows how the customs regarding snuff bottle use and social etiquette, similar in many ways to those of Qing-dynasty China, continue to this day.<sup>286</sup>

The discontinuation of the utilitarian roles of the twentieth-century Chinese snuff bottle did not suspend its gift-giving capacities. As the practice of snuffing expired, it was no longer commonplace for bottles to be used as a political currency in the imperial court or between snuff-users, but exchange continued especially between international parties on the basis of political and diplomatic motivation in the same way it had for centuries. The snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection are a testimony to this fact. In and of themselves, as foreign items in a museum setting, they represent an exchange between international parties. In many of the earliest museums like the Louvre and the British Museum, artistic items were tangible manifestations of power; the material losses and gains reflecting the power struggle between peoples. Throughout their history as exchange became more diplomatic, museums and their contents have continued to mirror the nature of these relationships.

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 118.

<sup>286</sup> According to Lyall, this development is remarkable considering how, during the tumultuous years under rule of the Soviet Bloc in the twentieth century, the written Mongolian language itself was replaced by Russian Cyrillic script while less fundamental cultural traditions such as snuff-taking survived intact. Thomas Lyall, 'The Mongolian Connection: A Living Tradition of Snuff-Taking Rediscovered', *Journal of the International Chinese Snuff Bottle Society*, Autumn, 2012, p. 22.



In this way, the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum tells the history not only of its contents, but of the parties involved in its acquisition.

## Chapter Five: Rewi Alley

The precedent for nearly any collection is that it is centred on the criteria of the collector, adhering to the categorisation of a person's worldview and unavoidably reflecting their life and character in some way. Therefore, to understand the international elements of this collection we must first consider the individual Rewi Alley. He had amassed the collection over the six decades he spent living in China from 1927 until his death in Beijing in 1987, sending most of the items to Canterbury Museum from the 1940s to 1960s. Originally of Canterbury, New Zealand, he found his way to China when he was twenty nine. Prior to this he had served seventeen months in France during World War One and had spent six years cleansing his memory of the experience through the hard, isolating work of farming in Moeawatea, Taranaki. While his efforts in this profession ultimately proved unsuccessful, Alley looked back on his time as a farmer as a lesson in both the merits and challenges of working hard and living simply.<sup>287</sup> With this thorough appreciation for the realities of labour, he was forever attuned to the pains of others in this capacity; a perspective which directed many of his actions in China.

After his six years of dedicated work for a cause which had proved to be fruitless, Alley drifted between nations and professions. He worked first with fertilizer in Australia, then on the wireless of the ship that bore him to Hong Kong, and eventually became a firefighter in Shanghai.<sup>288</sup> Within the fire department he spent most of his time assessing factories as a safety inspector. In this position he witnessed the extreme dichotomy between the foreign-run Shanghai in which he resided, and the native Shanghai where the factories were located.<sup>289</sup> Horrified by working conditions he did all he could as an inspector, and later as a relief worker for floods and famine, to improve the quality of

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<sup>287</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 22.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>289</sup> Shanghai, like many cities along the Yangtze River, had been subdivided since the Opium War (1832-1842) into International Settlements for economic and strategic purposes. These areas were autonomous and not subject to Chinese law, but to the laws of the country which leased the land. Willis Airey, *A Learner in China: The Life of Rewi Alley*, Christchurch, New Zealand, The Caxton Press & Monthly Review Society, 1970, p. 49.

living for the Chinese peasantry. As this course continued he fell in love with the country and more specifically with its people. He learnt to speak both Mandarin and the Shanghai dialect. He adopted two sons; the first a victim of drought and the second in need of sanctuary after his time with the Red Army.<sup>290</sup>

Alley also connected with many like-minded foreigners who wanted to see a change for the Chinese people. One of the first of these friends was Dr Joseph Bailie, who “urged Rewi to understand China from the villages, to see them first hand, and to value that social base.”<sup>291</sup> At the suggestion of Edgar and Peg Snow, Alley proposed a scheme for revitalising the industrial sector of Shanghai, a majority of which had been destroyed or disrupted by the war with the Japanese in 1937.<sup>292</sup> His plan, called Industrial Co-operatives (or Indusco) became known by its motto, *Gung Ho* (work together).<sup>293</sup> *Gung Ho* was responsible for the training and employment of over three hundred thousand workers, many of them villagers or refugees scattered by the fighting.<sup>294</sup> The workers were able to move inland to safer villages and band together against the Japanese in a productive, non-violent way, while simultaneously re-establishing stability in their daily lives. Alley also worked to establish schools which trained its students in equal part intellectual and practical skills. Six ‘Bailie Schools’ were set up in the 1940s, named after his friend who had worked for decades in China to inspire similar kinds of training programs.<sup>295</sup> Eventually Alley became headmaster of one of these institutions which was first set up at Shuangshipu but re-established at Shandan, Gansu Province, along the old Silk Road

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<sup>290</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, pp. 27-28.

<sup>291</sup> Geoff Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China*, Auckland, New Zealand, Hodder and Stoughton, 1980, p. 43.

<sup>292</sup> Through air-raids in 1937 the Japanese immobilised production by destroying a majority of the factories in Shanghai, the industrial capital: Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, pp. 30-32. In regards to Edgar and Peg Snow: Geoff Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China*, Auckland, New Zealand, Hodder and Stoughton, 1980, p. 101.

<sup>293</sup> A testimony to the success of the Industrial Co-operatives was that it led to the popularisation of this phrase ‘Gung Ho’ in the English language. After touring the various workshops with Alley, American Marines Captain Evans Carlson was inspired by the efforts of the movement. He began to use the phrase ‘Gung Ho’ in his own training program when he returned to the United States. This was later portrayed in a film about the marines which popularised the slogan. Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 36.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

near the Gobi desert. In this remote location the school was almost entirely self-sufficient, training its students to support and run the school equally with the staff. It was especially during this time in Shandan after 1945 that Alley began collecting Chinese artefacts.

Prior to this, Alley had frequented the old Guangdong Road curio market in Shanghai, where he developed an interest in Chinese ceramics and started collecting small antiques.<sup>296</sup> In 1937 Alley brought some of these items home with him on a trip to New Zealand. Among them were six ceramic snuff bottles which he gave to Canterbury Museum. This selection, while small, covers a variety of ceramic techniques: one blue and white (C1957.457, **fig. 16**), one red and white (C1957.458, **fig. 12**), one combined blue, red and white (C1957.461, **fig. 34**), one red-brown black and white (C1957.460, **fig. 35**) and two with crackled glazing; one rose coloured (C1957.456, **fig. 36**) and the other brown with an additional painted layer (C1957.459, **fig. 37**). In Alley's early stages as a collector he appears to have acquired pieces in order to explore and represent different types of ceramic decoration. However this cannot be ascertained since the remainder of Alley's collected works from this time, which he did not bring with him to New Zealand, were lost. When he returned to Shanghai from New Zealand in October he found that his house had been inhabited and robbed during the Japanese occupation in the months he'd been away.<sup>297</sup> His assortment of books, collection of pottery and the personal notes he'd made throughout his first decade in China had all been stolen.<sup>298</sup> Those items which he had taken overseas were all which remained of his first collection, and the experience may have influenced his decision in the future to relocate items to New Zealand for safekeeping.

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<sup>296</sup> Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography*, Beijing, New World Press, 1986, p. 315.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>298</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 31 and Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography*, Beijing, New World Press, 1986, pp. 100-101.

A total of sixty of the eighty snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection are ceramic, including the first six Alley brought home with him in 1937. This impressive majority clearly indicates that ceramics were a personal passion of Alley's. In his autobiography he states that:

Chinese ceramics, with all their fascination, had such a strong appeal to me that for decades I would take notes on the various potteries visited, the old kiln sites, in fact, everything related to pottery, whether folk or factory, in all parts of the land.<sup>299</sup>

His knowledge of pottery was such that from these notes he was able to publish the book *China: Ancient Kilns and Modern Ceramics* in 1982, albeit with full disclosure that he believed himself to be an amateur on the subject.<sup>300</sup> The book was also released in English the following year, co-authored by the Australian potter, Wanda Garnsey.<sup>301</sup> Alley appears to have been attracted to the combination of real life application and reverence for the past which could be represented through pottery manufacture. As he described,

The bare back and arms of a potter at his wheel in summer, with bars of light from windows or open doors shining over him and his work, took one right back through the ages, so that it was easy to imagine how his predecessors produced masterpieces of pottery art.<sup>302</sup>

He also appreciated the distinctly Chinese contribution of ceramic ware to the world, and how, even as a common material, it had nearly superseded its highly esteemed predecessors of bronze and jade in terms of value to the Chinese people.<sup>303</sup>

As a craft, pottery tended to feature in Alley's public pursuits as well, no doubt contributing to his admiration for it. Several pottery workshops were set up as part of the *Gung Ho* co-operatives. It was also one of the first trades to be established at the Bailie School at Shandan; students relying on

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<sup>299</sup> Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography*, Beijing, New World Press, 1986, p. 320.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 316.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 317.

the expertise of Japanese potter Noguchi, under whose tutelage they were able to produce high quality wares.<sup>304</sup> As a pottery enthusiast, Alley was delighted to spend so much time at the school; partially to witness the development of this studio, but also because “Shandan was an ancient Neolithic pottery site with shards of all dynasties out on the grasslands”.<sup>305</sup> During his years as headmaster he led many student expeditions to known excavation sites in the Gobi desert, and also chanced upon others as yet undiscovered, all of which expanded his collection considerably. One pottery site was found during the digging of an irrigation canal at Sibatian—the site of the school farm; another when scouting for mineral deposits (presumably as a source of raw, local material for one of the school’s workshops).<sup>306</sup> After the Sibatian site on the farm was found in 1949, a “small museum” was set up within the school to house the objects.<sup>307</sup> This direct interaction with artefacts, from digging them up to setting up a small museum, was very much in keeping with the spirit of the school’s hands-on approach to education as instigated by Alley. As Reynold speculates, the process was probably “an exciting way for the students to learn something of Chinese history.”<sup>308</sup>

When his time as headmaster came to an end in 1952, Alley adopted the new position of ‘peace worker’ for the China Peace Committee.<sup>309</sup> By this time he had spent most of his life in China and had demonstrated his unwavering interest in the Chinese people; proving his commitment to finding solutions to secure a better future for the country. As a foreigner with extensive experience in China, he was in a unique position to serve this cause. He assumed the role of an unofficial ambassador to assist diplomatic discussion between international parties devoted to peace. He went abroad to

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<sup>304</sup> Despite being called “an expert Japanese potter” by Alley in his autobiography, no further information is given on Noguchi and it is unclear as to who he was. It is possible that Alley was referring to Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988), who around this time was visiting other Asian countries including India. Ibid, p. 315.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

<sup>306</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 79.

<sup>307</sup> Archer to Duff, 22 December 1949, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 1.

<sup>308</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 79.

<sup>309</sup> J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Visions of Peace: The H.W. Youren Collection and The Art of Chinese Soft Diplomacy*, MTG Hawke’s Bay and University of Canterbury Confucius Institute, 2014, p. 29.

speak at a number of conventions, hosted foreign visitors to China, wrote books and translated traditional Chinese literature for distribution overseas.<sup>310</sup>

Alley's new agenda to speak out internationally for the People's Republic of China was at times problematic for the New Zealand government. In the 1940s New Zealand had been very supportive of Alley's enterprises in China (discussed below) and he had become something of a hero in his home country.<sup>311</sup> However during the Korean War, just as Alley assumed his role as peace worker and advocate for China, the New Zealand government's alignment with the United States was in direct conflict with Alley's cause.<sup>312</sup> Given the popularity he had acquired in the past decade, Alley held considerable influence over public opinion, and according to a 1952 survey done in the New Zealand capital, citizens were more prone to believing his word than their own government's.<sup>313</sup> As a result, the New Zealand government censored a great deal of his publicity within the country at this time.<sup>314</sup> Throughout the fifties and sixties New Zealand continued to officially agree with the United States in political matters regarding Communist China and attempted to discourage Alley's reputation.<sup>315</sup> It wasn't until the end of 1972, when New Zealand recognised China, that Alley was more favourably received by the government and proved helpful in renewing the diplomatic relationship between the two nations after their prolonged estrangement.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China—The Myth of Rewi Alley*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2003, pp. 73 and 76. Regarding literature he wrote for this cause see: Ibid p 85.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, pp. 62-6.

<sup>313</sup> 'The Germ Warfare Campaign in New Zealand', confidential report, Publicity and Information Division, Department of Tourism and Publicity, 30 April 1952, Marshall papers, 22/1, ATL. Referenced by Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China—The Myth of Rewi Alley*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2003, p. 65.

<sup>314</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China—The Myth of Rewi Alley*, London, Routledge Curzon, 2003, p. 66.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>316</sup> R. Bullen, 'Embracing Friendship through Gift and Exchange: Rewi Alley and the Art of Museum Diplomacy in Cold War China and New Zealand', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Routledge, 2015, p. 17.

## Chapter Six: Snuff Bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection

Alley's *modus operandi* was always based on practical endeavour and application. For instance, his most productive years of collecting started during the period he spent in Shandan when he was able to directly unearth artefacts himself. His favourite Chinese craft was also one which he was able to understand through its production in workshops around him. From surveying for raw materials to developing the skills to manufacture quality wares, Alley recognised that pottery was as relevant to China's present and future as it was to its past. It makes perfect sense, then, that many of the artefacts he acquired did not simply become part of a static collection for his private enjoyment, but were deliberately put to a more industrious use by means of gift-giving. After having lost most of his first collection in 1937 and facing the uncertain future posed by conflict between the Guomindang and Communist factions, Alley was probably first inclined to relocate items he collected for the purposes of safekeeping.<sup>317</sup> Through this process, and especially in light of his role as 'peace-worker' in later years, he realised that his collection could be better utilised overseas for the promotion of China.

Alley had already recognised that crafts like pottery could serve as a mutual interest to help connect people of different nations. In the workshops of the *Gung Ho* co-operatives and Bailie Schools, foreign experts were brought in to collaborate with the local workforce and students; the intention to train craftsmen and produce wares helped to simultaneously establish international relationships, truly pursuing the desire to 'work together'. While living in Beijing after 1952, Alley's interest in Chinese ceramics helped him connect with and befriend local shopkeepers from whom he purchased items for his collection and learnt more about the history of Chinese pottery in particular.<sup>318</sup> This passion was a common interest which allowed him to relate to more people in China, and Alley no doubt believed this could be accomplished outside of China as well. His collecting process therefore

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<sup>317</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 79.

<sup>318</sup> Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography*, Beijing, New World Press, 1986, p. 316.



became more dynamic; it was a matter of acquiring new pieces not with the intention of completing some kind of set, but to be passed on to people and places to serve the purpose of peace.

What can be called Alley's own 'collection' was, therefore, unusual in the sense that it was constantly changing as he eagerly redistributed its contents. He frequently parted with small items from his collection, passing them into the private ownership of almost every guest he hosted from overseas.<sup>319</sup> One of the first snuff bottles he passed on to an individual was item C1975.50 (**fig.19**), an amber-coloured, inside-painted glass bottle, gifted to H.M. Sievwright in 1947. Sievwright was at the time overseeing the delivery of New Zealand sheep to the Bailie School, accompanying them on the journey from Lyttelton to Shandan. This delivery was in alignment with the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), but was particularly significant as an indication of New Zealand support for the school after the Japanese war, when New Zealand was responsible for roughly forty percent of the school's funds.<sup>320</sup>

It was believed the donation of Corriedale sheep would help improve the quality of the flock already at the school, but Alley also recognised the impact the project would have for New Zealanders.<sup>321</sup>

After a failed effort by the administration in 1941 to accomplish the mission, Alley sought the assistance of the New Zealand people rather than the government for the second attempt in 1947. It was his view that making the project "entirely a social thing apart from government aid" would not only prove more successful, but help New Zealanders to be invested in the scheme.<sup>322</sup> By making civilians responsible instead of the government, Alley hoped New Zealanders would feel more involved in the exchange and by extension, become more interested in China. One such civilian, Sievwright, was the recipient of the snuff bottle which changed hands at this time; one piece of the

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<sup>319</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 80.

<sup>320</sup> Willis Airey, *A Learner in China: The Life of Rewi Alley*, Christchurch, New Zealand, The Caxton Press & The Monthly Review Society, 1970, p. 205.

<sup>321</sup> Regarding Corriedale sheep: Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 46.

<sup>322</sup> Willis Airey, *A Learner in China: The Life of Rewi Alley*, Christchurch, New Zealand, The Caxton Press & Monthly Review Society, 1970, p. 206.

small collection of objects which Alley gave in acknowledgement of his efforts in the project. It remained in Sievwright's possession until 1975 when his wife donated it to Canterbury Museum, making it the last snuff bottle to be added to the Museum's Rewi Alley Collection.

Gestures of gift-giving were one way Alley intended to encourage peaceful relationships between nations, while simultaneously inspiring an interest in China through public display of the donated artefacts. He sent many of the items to Canterbury Museum, an institution which Alley fondly remembered from his days as a student attending the Christchurch Boys High School in the same vicinity.<sup>323</sup> Much like his retreat to curio markets during his lunchbreaks in Shanghai, Alley recalled "spending lunch hour after lunch hour poring over the cases in the Canterbury Museum" as a boy.<sup>324</sup> His correspondence with Roger Duff, Director of the museum from 1948-1978, revealed Alley's interest in history as well as his intention for the organization to be instrumental in the task of encouraging favourable relations between New Zealand and China. In one letter to Duff, he conveys the lure of the mysteries offered by various dig sites in the Gobi desert where there lies a "wealth of material of the civilisations of ancient times awaiting classification and interest."<sup>325</sup> In the same letter he details one case being undertaken by a friend of his at the West China University, who intended to use belt patterns from the Qing dynasty (some of which Alley had found) to map the movements of people as they travelled through the area at that time.<sup>326</sup> Although he conveys his passion in this description of the potentials for archaeological study, Alley excuses his musings on the project as "idle chatter", seeing as he is unable to pursue such research given the workload at the Bailie School.<sup>327</sup> He places emphasis instead on what actions he *can* take by putting unearthed items to use in New Zealand, describing his intentions for doing so: "I think that it is a service we can

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<sup>323</sup> Rewi Alley, *Rewi Alley: An Autobiography*, Beijing, New World Press, 1986, p. 315.

<sup>324</sup> Alley to Duff, 1 March 1958, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>325</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>326</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>327</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

do to both China and New Zealand by getting a better understanding of Chinese culture, and of its history.”<sup>328</sup>

To accomplish this, Alley relied “on the charity of travellers” to carry larger items back home to be passed on to Canterbury Museum directly.<sup>329</sup> As he explained in 1947 in a letter to Duff:

Re collecting for you, I shall always be keen to do this, with what ever [sic] resources I have in hand. Since the war has ended, I have asked various people to take back odds and ends for you, and shall be pleased to know if any do actually arrive.<sup>330</sup>

One such courier was John Johnson (1922-2014), a member of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit, who brought back a Han dynasty pot and two vases thought to be two thousand years old.<sup>331</sup> Another was the famous New Zealand poet, Ron Mason (1905-1971), who transported one case of books and another of Korean pottery in 1957.<sup>332</sup> In a letter to Duff, Alley mentions that he did not have time to get a permit for most of the Chinese items he intended to send home with Mason.<sup>333</sup> However, smaller items including Chinese tiles and snuff bottles appear not to have required an export licence, as they arrived with Mason along with the Korean pottery.<sup>334</sup> The only confirmed snuff bottle brought by Mason in 1957 (although apparently there were several) was item C1957.1343 (**fig. 2**), a snuff bottle of significance to the collection as the only one made of jade. In 1958 Trevor Gebbie (dates unknown) travelled to China and wrote to Duff that during his trip,

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<sup>328</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>329</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>330</sup> Alley to Duff, 20 April 1947, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>331</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 79.

<sup>332</sup> Alley to Duff, 10 October 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5 and Mason to Duff, 12 October 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>333</sup> Alley to Duff, 4 October 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>334</sup> Alley to Duff, 10 October 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

I also saw Rewi Alley, who sends his regards, and who gave me a number of items for your China display. They consist of snuff bottles, some carving, and a book of script written on leaves.<sup>335</sup>

He is likely referring to the snuff bottles C1958.60 (**fig. 38**), C1958.70 (**fig. 6**), C1958.121 (**fig. 39**) and C1958.122 (**fig. 40**) which were catalogued as part of the collection that year.

Unlike larger, older pieces of the collection, snuff bottles were easy to transport, legally as well as physically. In 1958 Alley confirmed that snuff bottles did not require a permit to be sent overseas, as he wrote to Duff:

I put in for a permit to send you my collection of bits and pieces of old pottery, and so on.

But it was turned down. So I will try and get you paintings that can be sent out, bits of wood carving, and snuff bottles.<sup>336</sup>

It is uncertain whether snuff bottles were not old enough, or not considered to be of sufficient merit as artworks or antiques, to warrant an export licence. However Alley insisted that they were worthy contributions to the museum, even if their value was officially underappreciated:

There is a great range of art in snuff bottles that sooner or later will be recognized. Some of the loveliest bits of blue and white come in that form.<sup>337</sup>

Despite his claim that snuff bottles cover a diverse assortment of Chinese arts, his interest in ceramics suggests that part of Alley's personal appreciation for snuff bottles was as fine exhibitors of that craft. This is further evidenced by the ceramic content of the collection, with more than a quarter of the snuff bottles featuring the 'blue and white' decoration Alley mentions in this letter.

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<sup>335</sup> Gebbie-Duff, 6 June 1958, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>336</sup> Alley to Duff, 1 March 1958, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>337</sup> Alley to Duff, 1 March 1958, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

Most of the snuff bottles that Alley gifted to Canterbury Museum were catalogued in 1957. A total of twenty two bottles, “most of them better than anything we have”, were brought from China to Auckland by George Jackson (dates unknown) and then from Auckland to Christchurch by Jack Locke (1908-1996) in January of 1957.<sup>338</sup> Duff wrote in thanks to Jackson, saying, “it is typical of his [Alley’s] friends that they have been prepared to sacrifice weight of personal luggage allowance to bring them back safely, as you have done.”<sup>339</sup> In regards to the same gift, Duff wrote to Alley about a long-term project for what was fast becoming a significant collection in Canterbury Museum:

I do not know how to thank you for this and all the other donations, which have transformed our Chinese collection from a previously worthless standard to their present state of ranking among the very good collections of Australasia...the plan we are putting into operation this year [is] to set up a really good Hall of Chinese and Japanese Art, in which the Chinese section is almost entirely from your collection.<sup>340</sup>

It is likely this installation was already a serious aspiration for Duff by 1956, as the *South China Morning Post* reported that Duff intended “to see that at least one museum in New Zealand had a reasonable collection of Chinese cultural works of art”.<sup>341</sup>

With this purpose, Duff had travelled to China in 1956 for a tour conducted by the Chinese Cultural Association for Relations with Foreign Nations. In the five weeks he spent there, Duff and Alley met and purchased works for Canterbury Museum with the allowance of £250 bequeathed by the Canterbury Museum Trust Board.<sup>342</sup> The summation of these items, and additional gifts from Alley’s collection from his home in Beijing, were shipped by Duff to New Zealand in seven crates, arriving in

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<sup>338</sup> Duff to Alley, 4 February 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>339</sup> Duff to Jackson, 4 February 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>340</sup> Duff to Alley, 4 February 1957, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973’, 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>341</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 2 June 1956, CMR, ‘Roger Duff Special Subject Files, Research: Diary of Visit to China, May 1956 (3 copies) newspaper clippings, photographs, correspondence’, 4/2, box 65A, folder 391D.

<sup>342</sup> J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Wooing the West Softly: Rewi Alley, Chinese Art, and the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2016, unpaginated.

November of 1956.<sup>343</sup> Alley's contribution of antiques required an export licence, which Duff had to acquire during his trip. In anticipation of being unable to attain one, all of the items Duff purchased were reproductions which did not require a permit.<sup>344</sup> Alley and Duff spent a lot of time at the curio markets at Liu Li Chang, where Duff bought reproductions rather than antiques, and it is possible that snuff bottles could have been purchased for the collection at this time.<sup>345</sup> Considering that no snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection bear a date of arrival in 1956, but twenty eight were added in 1957 which are not definitively accounted for as those brought by either Mason or Jackson and Locke, it is possible that Duff returned to New Zealand in 1956 with snuff bottles and catalogued them the following year. However there is no conclusive evidence to support this, and the origin and means of shipment for most of the bottles added to the collection in 1957 (exempting the fourteen bottles known to have been carried by Jackson and Locke and the one by Mason) remains uncertain.<sup>346</sup>

Duff's trip in 1956 demonstrated the personal enthusiasm he had for New China. Not only was he invited as a guest of the Chinese Cultural Association for Relations with Foreign Nations, but he used the experience as a chance to strengthen the ties he and Canterbury Museum had with Alley; pursuing the opportunities that this relationship afforded the New Zealand public to come into contact with Chinese culture. Duff was highly motivated to promote China's interests in New Zealand, aiming to realise the full potential of Canterbury Museum to be a mediator between nations. After his trip he was "more convinced than ever that museums have a great role in promoting the cultural contacts which are basic to the mutual understanding and friendship of

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<sup>343</sup> J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Wooing the West Softly: Rewi Alley, Chinese Art, and the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2016, unpaginated.

<sup>344</sup> J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Wooing the West Softly: Rewi Alley, Chinese Art, and the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2016, unpaginated.

<sup>345</sup> J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Wooing the West Softly: Rewi Alley, Chinese Art, and the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2016, unpaginated.

<sup>346</sup> Jackson and Locke were responsible for carrying twenty two snuff bottles to Canterbury Museum in 1957. The fourteen which are catalogued in the Rewi Alley Collection as part of this shipment are as follows: C1957.7, C1957.8, C1957.11, C1957.14, C1957.20, C1957.17, C1957.4, C1957.12, C1957.13, C1957.15, C1957.18, C1957.19, C1957.21, C1957.5.

peoples”.<sup>347</sup> Equipped with both the vision and, thanks to Alley’s contributions, the content required for Canterbury Museum to “specialize in Chinese art”, Duff oversaw the successful installation of the Hall of Oriental Art in 1958.<sup>348</sup> Although items from the Rewi Alley Collection had previously been featured in specialist exhibitions (most notably in the ‘Exhibition of Chinese and Japanese Art’ in 1952), the Hall was the first space to permanently house items from the collection for public display. The current exhibition is housed in what is now called the Hall of Asian Decorative Arts, and for the most part the display has remained unchanged since October of 1994. Prior to this, the Hall was renovated once, and its contents altered several times; being replenished by and rotating through the hundreds of artefacts donated by Alley and others.<sup>349</sup> For instance, the snuff bottle C1971.24 (**fig. 41**) could only have been added to the exhibit after 1971 when Alley brought it to Canterbury Museum during his trip to New Zealand that year.<sup>350</sup> Today, over fifty of the eighty snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection are on display in the Hall, arranged together in a dedicated glass case. They are partially categorised by material, or rather by those materials which bear similarity to one another in terms of painted façade. A pamphlet issued in 1994 to accompany the reopening of the Hall confirms that these groupings adhere to the organisation of the entire exhibition: “The cases, where possible, contain artifacts with either material, artistic or functional similarities and follow a broad chronological tradition.”<sup>351</sup> For instance, distinction is given to the large number of blue and white ceramic snuff bottles, and these are lined up together at the front of the case in a manner which makes it easy to read reign marks applied to the base. Also grouped are the ceramic bottles

<sup>347</sup> Duff to Tan, 19 October 1956, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1943, 1956-1960’, 6/11, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>348</sup> Duff to Foord, 6 January 1958, CMR, ‘Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1957-59, 6/11, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>349</sup> In regards to the renovations of the Hall of Oriental Art after its opening in 1958, see Siobhan O’Brien, *Bringing the Dead to Life: Identification, Interpretation, and Display of Chinese Burial Objects in the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum*, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2016, Chapter 3.

<sup>350</sup> It is possible that snuff bottle C1971.24 had been in New Zealand for decades before it was donated to Canterbury Museum, seeing as a number of items were donated to the Rewi Alley Collection that year from the home of his deceased parents. J. Beattie and R. Bullen, *Wooing the West Softly: Rewi Alley, Chinese Art, and the Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2016, unpaginated.

<sup>351</sup> Canterbury Museum pamphlet, Hall of Asian Decorative Arts, November 1994, cited by Siobhan O’Brien, *Bringing the Dead to Life: Identification, Interpretation, and Display of Chinese Burial Objects in the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum*, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2016, p. 99.

with painted decoration of additional colours, and many of the inside-painted glass bottles. Beyond this, the display is laid out with consideration given to size and overall appearance of the bottles when set side by side. In this way, they can be juxtaposed with their contrasting neighbours to convey the variety of materials, and levels of craftsmanship embodied by the snuff bottle medium.

Despite the extensive involvement of Alley in the procuring of the items, there is little integration of the individual as being part of the history of the artefacts in the Hall of Asian Decorative Arts. When the Hall of Oriental Art reopened in 1976 after renovations, the Annual Report made note of the inclusion of a sculpted bust of Alley's likeness by Francis Shurrock.<sup>352</sup> Today, this bust remains at the entrance to the exhibit, along with two white jade seals commemorating Alley's eightieth birthday when he was given honorary citizenship in Beijing.<sup>353</sup> The accompanying display card, however, does not detail his relation to the collection, nor do the labels throughout the Hall provide information regarding the intentions of Alley and Duff for the objects. In addition, the display provides very limited information about the artefacts and their history within their country of origin.<sup>354</sup> For instance the case with snuff bottles labels them as such and places them within the Qing dynasty, but does nothing to explain their social history or material significance, despite hinting at the latter in the manner of their arrangement. The pamphlet released for the opening of the present exhibition reveals that:

Objects in the gallery are presented purely as items of decorative art in their own right; it is not the intention of the displays to attempt to cover the last 5000 years of Asian social and

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<sup>352</sup> In regards to the Annual Report: Canterbury Museum Annual Report 1976-77, CMR, Fine Arts 7/3, Folder 5. Also: Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 80.

<sup>353</sup> Philippa Reynolds, *Rewi Alley: From Canterbury to China*, Christchurch, Christchurch—Gansu Friendly Relations Committee of the Christchurch City Council Christchurch, 1997, p. 80. Also mentioned in the accompanying display card in the exhibit at the Hall of Oriental Art.

<sup>354</sup> Siobhan O'Brien, *Bringing the Dead to Life: Identification, Interpretation, and Display of Chinese Burial Objects in the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum*, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2016, p. 100.



technological history. The artifact-intensive exhibition is aimed at high visual impact, with a minimum of labels...<sup>355</sup>

In light of this, perhaps the immediate appeal of the objects themselves—their material and artistic splendour—was thought to be complicated rather than accentuated by the details of their long history.

There were plans to enrich the current exhibition by providing the tools for visitors to investigate items in the collection.<sup>356</sup> After the opening of the Hall in 1994, a Museum report specified that:

Yet to be installed are an ambient sound system and a multi-media computer station that will encourage visitors to browse through written and pictorial information not included in the displays.<sup>357</sup>

Although the aim was to ready the logistics for this alteration in 1996, the project was not successfully realised.<sup>358</sup> As such, the exhibit continues to lack sufficient information regarding the history of the contents and the development of the collection. The entirety of the Rewi Alley Collection is currently the subject of a three year research project; the results of which might be drawn upon to help augment their display in the future. With a Marsden Grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand, principal investigators Dr RV Bullen and Dr JJ Beattie commenced a study of the Rewi Alley Collection in 2014. Their investigation addresses the significance of the collection on a national level as the largest and most comprehensive assortment of Chinese art in New Zealand, as well as from an international perspective as one of the first instances of material culture being exported from New China for the purposes of soft diplomacy.

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<sup>355</sup> Canterbury Museum pamphlet, Hall of Asian Decorative Arts, November 1994, cited by Siobhan O'Brien, *Bringing the Dead to Life: Identification, Interpretation, and Display of Chinese Burial Objects in the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum*, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2016, p. 100.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, pp. 100-101.

<sup>357</sup> Hall of Asian Decorative Arts opening, Annual Report Director's Office, CMR, cited by Siobhan O'Brien, *Bringing the Dead to Life: Identification, Interpretation, and Display of Chinese Burial Objects in the Rewi Alley Collection at Canterbury Museum*, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2016, p. 100.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 101.

## Chapter Seven: Valuing Snuff Bottles as Items of Exchange

The snuff bottles of the Rewi Alley Collection demonstrate the ways in which snuff bottles continue to play a role as items of exchange. Unlike artworks and artefacts which might adopt this role primarily upon entering the sphere of the museum, snuff bottles were always the subject of gift exchange and carry out this function to this day. Through the redistribution of snuff bottles, Alley's experience conveys this unchanged aspect of the items' social history. Alley used snuff bottles as gifts on an individual level with friends and associates. Such was the case for item C1975.50 (**fig. 19**) given to Sievwright in 1947 after the shipment of Corriedale sheep. In the spirit of establishing these kinds of good relationships on an international scale, Alley used snuff bottles as part of his campaign to promote the interests of China in New Zealand. This was mostly at a time when China was first starting to employ means of soft diplomacy to garner an interest in Chinese culture throughout the world; a diplomatic solution to the negative reputation they had as a communist nation during the McCarthy years. Alley's generosity was directly reciprocated by Roger Duff in particular, who demonstrated his "appreciation chiefly by press publicity concerning yourself [Alley] and the Peoples Government."<sup>359</sup> Although Alley's intention was to promote diplomacy between nations and not for self-serving purposes, Duff's emphasis on Alley's role as a donor also resulted in his favourable representation to the New Zealand community at a time when the government was trying to discredit his influence.

The snuff bottles of the Rewi Alley Collection reveal the interests of Alley in terms of his character and life philosophy. His partiality towards ceramics—as an applicable skill, a product of labour and a merit to the history of China—reflects the value he placed on practicality and the creative force and accomplishment of the Chinese people. His particular inclination towards the material is evident in its presence within the collection, represented more than any other material. His agenda to deliver

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<sup>359</sup> Duff to Alley, 4 February 1957, CMR, 'Fine Arts: Rewi Alley Collection, Correspondence and Notes: 1947-1957, 1973', 6/11, box 1, folder 5.

items to a safer location and inspire an interest in Chinese culture overseas is embodied in his donation of items, including snuff bottles, to Canterbury Museum over the years. Rather than keep his collection with him for personal enjoyment, he sought practical solutions to his goals by taking advantage of the role of snuff bottles as items of exchange. The specific passions and objectives which drove Alley in his life also shaped his approach to collecting. It was a dynamic and goal-intensive process; relying on the co-operation of individuals to establish cross-cultural communication. These distinctive aspects of the Rewi Alley Collection help us to understand the circumstances in which the international exchange took place.

As a part of the Rewi Alley Collection, the snuff bottles were exchanged in a way which symbolised a number of relationships at varying stages. They initiated the relationship between Alley and Duff; the donations to Canterbury Museum served as an introduction and ongoing liaison before the two men even met in person. They demonstrated the relationships of Alley with individuals like Mason, Gebbie, Jackson and Locke, who delivered snuff bottles to Canterbury Museum on Alley's behalf during their travels. They reflected both Alley's proactive reputation within China and his past ties with Canterbury, and how these connections facilitated the relationship between both nations. And of course, they were given to Canterbury Museum to encourage the relationship between New Zealand and China to grow in the spirit of friendship and peace. The snuff bottles of the Rewi Alley Collection demonstrate that the function of snuff bottles in a gift-giving capacity to curry favour from recipients, positively represent donors, and solidify relationships, is an aspect of the objects' social history which has remained unchanged since the Qing dynasty.

## Conclusion:

By looking exclusively to examples within the Rewi Alley Collection, this thesis has demonstrated how snuff bottles are valued both for referencing thousands of years' worth of material history in China and serving the purposes of exchange as effectively as they did in the Qing dynasty.

Categorising collections by material is by no means a new approach to snuff bottles research, however instead of simply using this as a way of exploring a variety of Chinese arts, in this thesis I have attempted to show how this can be a means of recognising the social value of snuff bottles, tying this into the broader picture of snuff bottle history. By reviewing their social functions, snuff bottles can be understood as objects of value within the realms of exchange, symbolising and facilitating relationships. In this capacity, snuff bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection reflect the aspirations of individuals like Rewi Alley and Roger Duff to encourage diplomatic relations between the nations of New Zealand the People's Republic of China.

This thesis represents the first exclusive study of the snuff bottles in Canterbury Museum's Rewi Alley Collection, and while I have attempted to provide a relevant account of the items within the context of snuff bottle history and the collection itself, there is still a great deal of research to be done in this area. As mentioned in the introduction, the subject matter depicted on these bottles has not been a part of this study. Further investigation into this would provide a greater understanding of these bottles as individual works of art. An analysis of the themes brought up by these subjects could also offer a gateway into a study of Chinese literature and philosophy. So too would research into the artistic traditions represented by the decoration of these snuff bottles enhance the understanding of the aesthetics and traditions of Chinese art. Clearly, snuff bottles are excellent at representing a multitude of Chinese subjects, stretching far beyond those material and social histories discussed in this thesis. I hope that my analysis has provided a thorough account of those topics of most relevance to the studies of the Rewi Alley Collection, and that the example of this collection will help contribute to the greater field of snuff bottle research.

Snuff Bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection Discussed in Text:



Figure 1: C1957.8



Figure 2: C1957.1343

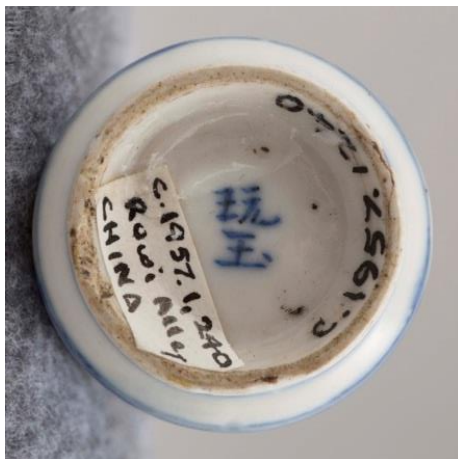


Figure 3: C1957.1240



Figure 4: C1957.19



Figure 5: C1957.1236

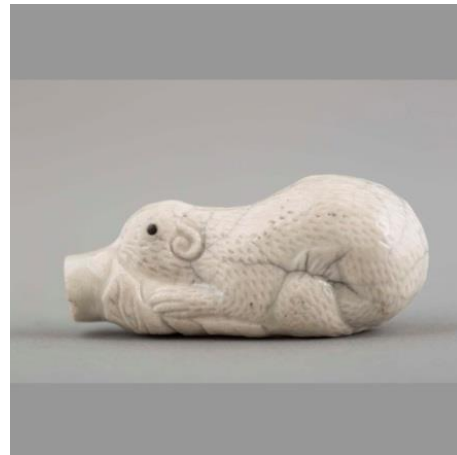


Figure 6: C1958.70



**Figure 7:** C1957.1235



**Figure 8:** C1957.20



**Figure 9:** C1957.1271



**Figure 10:** C1957.1285



**Figure 11:** C1957.1265



**Figure 12:** C1957.458



**Figure 13:** C1957.1262



**Figure 14:** C1957.23



**Figure 15:** C1957.1242



**Figure 16:** C1957.457



**Figure 17a:** C1957.1289



**Figure 17b:** C1957.1289



**Figure 18a:** C1957.1291



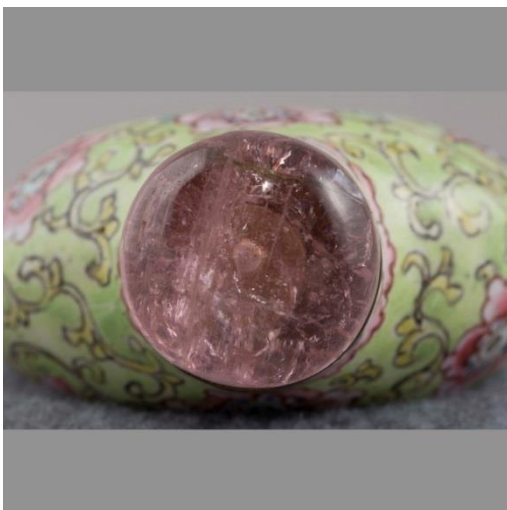
**Figure 18b:** C1957.1291



**Figure 18c:** C1957.1291



**Figure 19:** C1975.50



**Figure 20:** C1957.1283



**Figure 21:** C1957.1270





**Figure 22:** C1957.9



**Figure 23a:** C1957.5



**Figure 23b:** C1957.5



**Figure 23c:** C1957.5



**Figure 24a:** C1957.464



**Figure 24b:** C1957.464



**Figure 25a:** C1957.467



**Figure 25b:** C1957.467



**Figure 26a:** C1957.463



**Figure 26b:** C1957.463



**Figure 27a:** C1957.468



**Figure 27b:** C1957.468



**Figure 28a:** C1957.463



**Figure 28b:** C1957.463



**Figure 29a:** C1957.1280



**Figure 29b:** C1957.1280



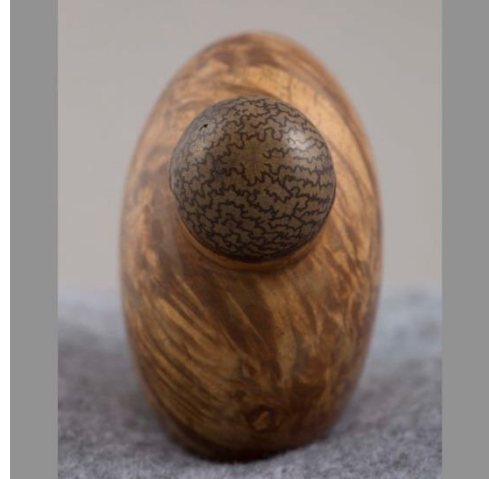
**Figure 30a:** C1957.12



**Figure 30b:** C1957.12



**Figure 31a:** C1957.1292



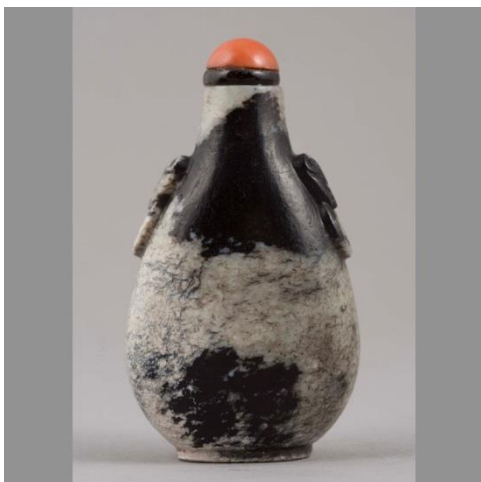
**Figure 31b:** C1957.1292



**Figure 32a:** C1957.1293



**Figure 32b:** C1957.1293



**Figure 33a:** C1957.1287



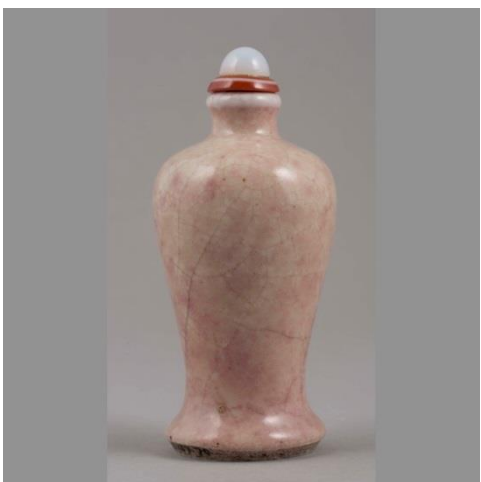
**Figure 33b:** C1957.1287



**Figure 34:** C1957.461



**Figure 35:** C1957.460



**Figure 36:** C1957.456



**Figure 37:** C1957.459



**Figure 38:** C1958.60



**Figure 39:** C1958.121





**Figure 40:** C1958.122



**Figure 41:** C1971.24

Snuff Bottles in the Rewi Alley Collection Not Discussed in Text:



C1957.4



C1957.7



C1957.11



C1957.13



C1957.14



C1957.15



C1957.17



C1957.18



C1957.21



C1957.1238



C1957.1239



C1957.1241





C1957.1243



C1957.1245



C1957.1246



C1957.1247



C1957.1248



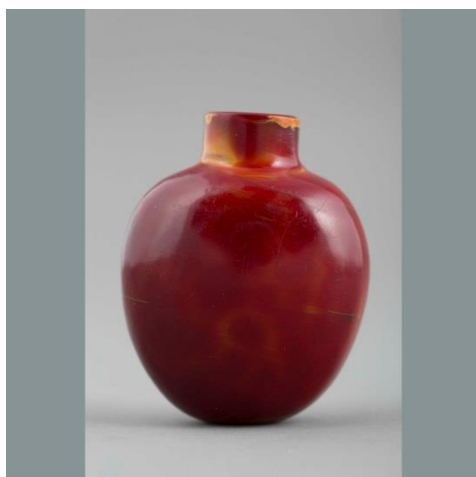
C1957.1250



C1957.1252



C1957.1253



C1957.1255



C1957.1257



C1957.1258



C1957.1261



C1957.1263.2



C1957.1263



C1957.1264



C1957.1267



C1957.1269



C1957.1273



C1957.1276.1



C1957.1278



C1957.1281



C1957.1282



C1957.1322



C1957.1323



C1957.1328



C1960.93

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